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JUDGMENT



BY ALICE BROWN



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[See p. 6]

"THE GIRL STARTED TO HER FEET"

Argument

by

John Brown

Author of "The American Slave"



NEW YORK: LEARNED AND COMPANY,
152 NASSAU STREET, CORNER
OF BROADWAY.
1852.



Miss L. L. L.



J u d g m e n t

A Novel by

Alice Brown

Illustrated by W. T. Smedley



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I

THE house John Markham had built for himself, out of his manufacturing business, stood near the park, fronting an avenue of trees. A vacant lot on either side had been sown down to make a breadth of lawn, and the river was at the back. No other city house had such big breathing-space. It signified a bewildering sum of money in the real estate it had absorbed; but in itself it was only a square, solid structure filled with comforts of the simpler sort. There was the plainest furnishing consistent with width of wall and height of ceiling. The rooms had no paucity of convenience; yet at

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BY APPOINTMENT
TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN
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every point they told the story of people who lived plainly. The one telltale luxury about the place lay in the adornment given by natural beauties; for there were flowers in profusion, and open fires burned in every room.

This snowy evening of the early spring Mrs. Markham sat in the library between lamp and fire, as if she craved the fellowship of both. She was a slender woman, in a white dress. Her face wore a natural pallor, and her movements had a rhythm. "Her body thought;" it seemed to be the instrument of a spirit so keen as to demand continuous expression. Her pure profile had an aspiring look, half mystical, half loving; her gray eyes were deeply set, and the black hair above was brushed back in a loose abundance. She was waiting. When the clock struck the quarter-hour she turned to it in quick impatience, though she knew it was no



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later. Then the lower door opened to a latch-key, and she rose with an expectant grace, trembling yet controlled. A step ran up the stair, and a young woman appeared in the doorway. She was dark, with the poise of Diana, and her clothes, in their commonplace cut, flouted her beauty. Mrs. Markham put out both her hands.

"Come here, child," she called, in her soft contralto. "Come here, Elizabeth."

The girl walked up to her step-mother, and stood there, smiling and pulling off her gloves. She was not a creature of outspoken greetings; but her face, full of an almost brooding interest in the woman, made up for silence.

"What is it, Helen?" she asked. "What made you send? The settlement is quite agog, your messenger was so urgent."

She had tossed off her jacket and drawn up another chair, a straight one. There she seated herself and waited, her

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hands on her knees. Her brows drew together in a watchful intensity. She looked like a doctor prepared to pass sentence on a case. Mrs. Markham had awakened to the alertness of a person who has something to tell. Her face warmed rather with expression than with color.

"I must let you understand the situation first," she said. "Your father is in the West, fighting out the strike."

"Yes. He hasn't yielded. That was on the bulletins when I came by."

"Your brother is on his way home. He sailed from Cape Colony on the ninth."

The girl drew her brows together and narrowed her gaze. She was puzzled.

"Yes, dear, yes," she answered. "But why do you remind me of things I know? What makes you so queer about it? Why do you say 'your brother,' and not just 'Kent'? What's the matter, Helen?"

Mrs. Markham sat straighter and held the arms of her chair, as if to steady

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herself. "I want you to realize just how we are placed."

"Placed, Helen?"

But Helen did not listen. Her words had a despairing thrill.

"And your brother is engaged to Rosamond March."

Elizabeth leaned forward and laid a hand on her step-mother's knee. She spoke gently, as we reassure the sick.

"Yes, Helen, yes. What then?"

Mrs. Markham looked at her for a moment from a still face where reflection seemed to be moving below the surface.

"Do you remember Jane Harding?" she asked.

"She was the seamstress we hired by the day when things were going so badly with us?"

"Yes. Later she had a little class down at Woodside."

"An old-maidish sort of woman—spin-

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ster to the bone. She had one daughter."

"Yes."

"Big, blowsy thing, pretty as a tulip, and vain! My stars! wasn't she vain? She stole my doll's best dress and bunched it up into a necktie."

"Jane Harding came to see me on Tuesday. She says"—her voice paused upon an eloquent note, but she went on quietly—"her daughter went to the bad. That was the way she put it."

"Did Linda marry?"

"No. She died unmarried. But the man"—again she halted, and the girl looked at her with a candid interest—"the one this woman accuses—the man was—Kent."

The girl started to her feet. "Kent!" she repeated. "Kent! Helen, how can you?"

"It is true. I am convinced of it."

"Give me your proofs. Helen, I am

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ashamed of you! I can't forgive you. Don't expect it of me—ever."

Mrs. Markham took no notice of the outburst. It was a part of the difficult situation, and she overrode it as if it were a wave. "Mrs. Harding brought me letters," she said. "They were from Kent—some to her, some to the girl. She read me parts of them. It is all true."

Elizabeth seated herself with determination, like one recalled to an habitual attitude of mind. Her face took on the concentrated look it wore when she was thinking over her settlement work. In that moment she had decided that neither the grief nor wrong of this calamity should touch her at the core. She made it a point of honor not to wince. This was no worse for her than for girls more used to shame.

"I am willing to assume you are right," she said, coldly. "For the sake

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of finding out the next step, nothing more. They want money, do they?"

"Yes. She—Jane Harding—wants a sum of money."

"If it were true, they should have it. Helen"—her voice quivered, and, forgetting her denial, she ended, passionately—"they must have it. But I forget. Linda is not living."

"No."

"Then Jane Harding wants money for herself. Is that it?"

"That is it. She wants money, and she intends to get it—hideously. She has a package of Kent's letters. She proposes to sell them to us."

"Blackmail!"

Helen nodded. Her face had a dry anguish, disproportioned, Elizabeth took time to consider, to this stage of the game. The tragedy of it, she thought, lay in what was done and over; there was nothing in this present phase to evoke more

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than what she herself felt—a nauseating distaste for the dead body of past sin.

“It is very easy to deal with a case like that,” she said, coldly, out of her hatred for the savor of it. This seemed quite unlike the same thing which made the commonplace of life in tabulated reports. “We need a lawyer.”

“We can’t deal with this in any ordinary way, Elizabeth. If we anger her, she will use the letters.”

“What does she propose doing with them?”

“She will tell Rosamond the story. The letters are her proof.”

The girl gave a little cry, full of wounded love. She lifted her head proudly. “It won’t hurt Rosamond,” she said. “Rosamond knows it already. Kent would never have entered into an engagement to marry Rosamond without telling her.”

“That is just the point. He didn’t tell her.”

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The girl started up from her chair. Then she seated herself, with a wilful calm. "Don't expect me to believe a thing like that, Helen," she returned. "I won't, I can't, even from you."

"Listen," said the older woman, gently. "The night Rosamond promised to marry him, Kent came in here within an hour after he left her, and talked to me. Kent was very happy that night. He told me Rosamond had accepted him. Then he stopped and pondered. His face got seamy, as it does when he sits by the fire and fancies nobody is looking. Finally he said to me that there was something Rosamond ought to know. I remember his words: 'But she won't let me tell her. I'm afraid that's a mistake, mother. It's a mistake.'"

"What did you say?"

"I asked if what he meant was past and gone. He said, 'Yes.' I asked him if any one had a right to trouble her, and

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he said, 'No right—but there might be ghosts.' I said, 'Well, Rosamond is chiefly spirit. She won't be afraid of ghosts.' We both laughed, and I believe we cried a little. I'm sure I did."

"Was that the end of it?"

"No. We talked more. I took his two hands in mine as I used to do when he was little and had got into scrapes. 'Kent,' I said, 'have you done wrong?' 'Yes,' said he. I asked him if he had tried to make it right. He held up his dear head and looked me in the eyes. 'Yes, mother,' said he, 'honest, I have. Some things can't be righted, but I've done all I could.' I asked him if Rosamond were innocently crowding out somebody who ought to have her place. He winced then, but he said, 'No. There is nobody. She is dead.'"

"So you advised him not to tell?"

"Not that, Elizabeth. I simply couldn't advise him at all. I had the

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same feeling about Rosamond that he had brought away with him. I felt her girl's passion for him, her untouched faith, her wanting to take him as he was, home from the wars of youth, with scars on him, but a creature to be adored, trusted—oh, it didn't seem well to resurrect wrong, tawdry things, and paste them over a picture such as that!"

She rose, a different creature, fired by passion, and stood there trembling, her nostrils big with life.

"So somebody else is going to tell her," said Elizabeth, practically, "if we don't pay down money. Frankly, Helen, I should pay the money. How much does she want?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Heavens! Well, I should temporize. I should play the woman. Give her something, and ward her off till Kent comes home. Then he will tell Rosamond himself. But I should do anything to save

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Rosamond from this brutal shock, especially now when her mother is ill. She can't afford the strain."

"Ah, but that's it. The woman is clever. She won't be played with. She demands the whole. Right or wrong, Bess, I think I should give it to her—but I haven't it. I've no money."

The girl cast her a swift look, as if she were ashamed.

"It's abominable," she cried, "to live in the midst of this and have no money!"

Her step-mother threw out her hands in passionate deprecation.

"I have never wanted money of my own," she said, hotly. "I prefer to have your father give it to me. It is a part of the fun we have, your father and I, for me to pick his pockets, as if he were a working-man. It makes him realize his wealth, his power. He likes it, and so do I."

She was flushed, trembling like a girl. Elizabeth looked at her and smiled with

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reminiscent tenderness which seemed to spring from long devotion.

"You're a goose over father, dear," said she. "Well, he's a goose over you. But you've only to ask him for money. Have you asked?"

Helen's face took on the lines of baffled will. Some hurt also was there.

"I wrote him at once," she said, in a low tone. "I told him everything. He telegraphed. Here is the message." She took a crumpled paper from the little bag at her side.

Elizabeth read it with a frowning brow.

"'He must take the consequences of his own acts.' That's just like my father!" she cried, in an outburst of the tempestuous nature she had inherited from him. "It's his everlasting glorification of what he calls justice. Do you know what will happen to my father some day?" She rose, and the two women stood facing each other like antagonists.

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Helen reached out a jealous hand and took the paper. She smoothed its folds as if it were precious to her, coming, even at such a remove, from her husband, and laid it carefully away. The girl went on:

"My father believes in the old Hebraic law—'an eye for an eye.' There's something in it. But as sure as he's a living man and tries to administer it himself, some day it will turn on him."

"Don't!" commanded the wife. "You must not, Elizabeth."

But a spirit had entered into the girl, the emotional frenzy that made her like her father and her brother, so that the three, when it stirred in them at once, seemed to Helen like panoplied warriors bent on battle.

"Justice never comes the way we think," she continued, in a rapid flood—"never! Kent expected to be punished for that old sin of his. He knew the scourge would fall. But it's Rosamond who's going to

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get it, and Kent will have to see her wince. And my father—”

“Don’t speak of your father!” cried the other woman, with a voice of authority. “You shall not—in that tone!”

Elizabeth took no notice. “My father frightens me,” she said, “he is so hard. He thinks he knows. He means to mete out justice. He won’t stand by the sinner while God wields the knout. He won’t bend. Helen, sometime he’ll have to break.”

“Would you have him yield to an unjust demand?” flamed Helen, in a swift defence. “You and I yield because we are women and because Rosamond must be saved. Men are different.”

“My father is different,” said the girl. “He is so different he can send a telegram like that, and stand aside and let the wheels roll on, no matter whom they crush. Sometime he will be punished.”

Helen was shuddering under the on-

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slaught of the passionate young voice, and Elizabeth hardly paused.

"I have watched my father for years, and I have seen him get his punishments. But the trouble is, he never knows them when they come. There was another time when he started justice rolling, and stood aside to let it take its course. He allowed the battle to be fought without him—"

"No, Bess, no!"

"You fought it for him, without precisely knowing what you fought, poor dear! You simply knew there was deadly warfare between my father and me. You broke, trying to patch it up. We managed to crush you, my father and I together. You were ill three years, and he never knew what hurt you. You'd be ill now if I hadn't refused to eat his bread and taken myself out of the way. But for those three years he had to see you suffer. And he adores you, Helen."

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The other woman's face broke into a quiver like that of tears. She looked divinely happy. "Yes," she said, softly—"yes, he does."

"And that is the way he'll be paid back. Life will strike him there. He has left people alone to fight out what he presumes to think they have deserved. He will be left alone. That will be his judgment. He has stood here, beckoning and beckoning to it. It will come."

Helen was not trembling now; a noble calm enveloped her. "No," said she. "No. We must fight it off."

"You can't fight off law. That's what it is—this course of things. It's law."

Helen spoke swiftly with the rush of inspiration, poesy meeting fact.

"There is a law above the law. They are like the steps to an altar. I shall fight my way up over them, to that last appeal."

Elizabeth put a hand upon the slender

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wrist. The muscles felt like iron to her touch.

"You are a gallant thing, Helen," she said, "but your fighting won't do any good. My father needs to be smashed. He needs straight talk, crude common-sense. You live here with your flowers and books, praying for him. It's lovely, but it's like the old simile—stroking the turtle's shell."

Helen had scarcely heard. Her delicate brows were drawn together in a frown. She began with difficulty to set forth what she had never clearly formulated, even to herself.

"Sometimes I think what we call the will of God is our own will: not our individual will, but the accumulated word of generation upon generation. We are like voices that cry out, demanding something. We decree love and we get it—for somebody. It is like a beautiful creation, like flowers in a garden. Or we call for vengeance."

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"We are not so big as that, not so important. We are atoms, dear. The laws were made and given us."

"Sometimes I think we make the law by our desires. No, we don't make it; we call it out from where it sleeps. So, if a person hurts me, I must not remember it. I must hide it even from myself, for fear my cry is heard, for fear that little compensating lash flies back to strike the hand that bruised me."

Elizabeth smiled at her with an extreme tenderness, yet as one who recognized a fantasy and felt she must indulge it.

"It almost seems, Helen," said she, quizzically, in the midst of her foreboding, "as if you had taken out a patent for hoodwinking the universe."

Helen smiled back at her; but she answered, gravely:

"The universe is a fluent thing. It moves here and there, like the deep sea. How many laws science has called forth

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from where they seemed to sleep! Well, the spirit has its laws."

"So you don't want me to mention my father's transgressions, for fear God will hear, and punish him."

"I don't want you to beckon his punishments. That was what you said yourself, awhile ago. We beckon things."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to take hold with me, and lift with both your hands. There are things which we can't do, because your father should decide them. We can't meddle. Still we must act."

"Sit down, dear," said Elizabeth, gently.

Helen seemed to her a beautiful enthusiast, quite unrelated to the present world. She was a book to be read by the fire, a strain of music heard at twilight to fit the worker for next day's wrestling; but not herself suited, through divine intent, to dusty ways.

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"I shall take hold," she said. "We must think how."

Helen settled to an immediate consideration of the moment. The mystical look had faded from her face. Yet it was hardly mystical. It was the seeking gaze of one who strives to find untrodden paths.

"We must be practical," she said. "The woman herself is clever. We must be more so."

"I still say," argued Elizabeth, her hands on her knees in an attitude of musing, "that I should temporize. I should stave her off until Kent comes."

Helen shook her head.

"If you could see her," she returned, "you wouldn't entertain that for a moment. She has laid her train. She is entirely resolved and absolutely methodical. She will do exactly what she says."

"I still don't see why you are afraid to call in a lawyer."

"You'd know if you saw her. She told

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me she had half a dozen ways of reaching us, if we choked her off. Through the papers, she said. Kent has his enemies—”

“Yes, like father. Kent has flaunted justice. Dear as he is, he has dealt some knock-down blows.”

“And now when he is coming home with his laurels, when he’s on everybody’s tongue, ‘the brilliant war correspondent,’ now he must pay! There are two papers I can think of that would be glad to make him smart.”

Elizabeth nodded.

“Yes. Kent called them scurvy sheets. That was the least of it. He’s been a good fighter, and there was a time when he couldn’t move without infuriating some one. He acted as if he were cast for the Archangel Michael. That won’t do. I wonder he has escaped satire. But he’s a splendid dear!” Justice flamed up in her. “I said I’d pay Jane Harding. I wouldn’t. I’d fight it out.”

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Then both women thought of Rosamond, and their blood cooled. This was not to be contested while innocence stood in the background, for random shafts to strike.

"Send for my father," counselled Elizabeth. "He must come, at least."

Helen shook her head drearily.

"He won't come," she answered. "He will fight out the strike."

"Yes, he will. And if ever there was a just strike, this is it."

"But your father won't yield, Bess. He can't." Her defence was hot again.

"Why can't he yield except that he's my father—old John Markham, who will go on banging his head into brick walls until he batters out his brains?"

"He is investigating the situation. If their demands are just, your father will accede. Not otherwise. And not because they force him."

"No," said Elizabeth, dryly, "not be-

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cause they force him. It will take the Hebrew God to force my father."

"What would you do," asked Helen, suddenly, "if you met a case like this among your neighbors at the settlement?"

"Do? Buck up against it. Shake my fist in its face. Find Jane Harding, run her to earth—but where is the woman?"

Again Helen shook her head. "I don't know."

"How are you to communicate with her?"

"She is coming here."

"When?"

"She wouldn't say. She did say it would do no good to follow her or hunt her down. If she should fail, others are ready to carry out the plan."

"She brought the letters here?"

"Copies of them. She left those with me."

"What for?"

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"She wanted me to read them through. I had heard only the parts she chose."

"Have you read them?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"They were Kent's. I hadn't any right."

"Stuff and nonsense, Helen! They're not letters now—they're evidence. Where are they?"

Helen pointed to the library-table. "In that drawer."

Elizabeth rose and pulled at the drawer. It was locked.

"I don't feel sure we have a right to see those letters," said Helen, regarding her in a doubtful consideration.

"Letters that have been read by Jane Harding, copied, bandied about we don't know where?" A thought assailed her and took her breath. "Why are you so sure they are Kent's letters, after all?"

"She read me parts of them," said Helen

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again. "That was the way she began. She said it was the case of a poor woman. She wanted my advice. She read a little here and there, and suddenly the truth broke in on me. They were Kent's letters. Those were his turns of style, his tricks of speech. I stopped her. She didn't need to tell me."

"Were they"—Elizabeth's tone was low and her face burned red—"were they love-letters?"

"No, not in any particular. If they ever could have been, the time had passed. They were very practical, yet very sad. There was a tired tone about them. They were a good deal like Kent before he found Rosamond. They were about money chiefly. About marriage, too. He wished to marry Linda."

"Why didn't she marry him?" said Elizabeth, musingly. "Why not, I wonder?"

"Jane told me. By that time there was

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another man, a man she did like. She never cared for Kent."

The girl rose in quick revolt, and then sat down again.

"It's pretty tawdry, isn't it?" she said.

Helen nodded, without looking up, as at a situation over which she had pondered more than her fill.

"When was this?" asked Elizabeth, suddenly.

"It was the year Kent left home."

The girl's face flamed, and then as rapidly grew white.

"The year my father quarrelled with him when he stood by Graham Landor and wouldn't give him up because he was disgraced," she said, in a swift current of hot speech. "Nobody would talk about it with me then. I didn't know it all until long after."

"It was that year," said Helen, quietly. "Kent had very little money. He boarded near the Hardings'. Jane said so."

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Elizabeth sat meditating, her mouth in an iron line. She seemed to be straying farther and farther into some byway of old thought. When she recalled herself, it was as one who forswears such sad indulgences that she may act instead.

"Well," said she, conclusively, "I think I must see those letters."

Her will, so like John Markham's, moved the wife, used to compliance, like a message from him.

"I think so, too," said she. "Here is the key." She drew it from her chate-laine, and Elizabeth, with a quick decisiveness, unlocked the drawer. She took out a package and held it up.

"Yes," said Helen, "there they are."

A soft rush and rustle fled through the hall. The two women looked at each other in startled questioning. A girl stood in the doorway, lightly poised upon a running foot. She was of the angelic type, to grow into a Madonna when life should veil

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her in new knowledge and desire. Her face had the beauty of the blonde, alive now with merry expectation. She threw back her cloak, and, hastening forward, took Helen's hands and kissed them.

"Rosamond!" breathed Helen, and Elizabeth echoed,

"Rosamond!"

II

ELIZABETH sat there with the letters in her hand while the two other women kissed and looked at each other in a frank delight. When Rosamond turned to her, with the same abounding sweetness and certainty of welcome, she rose, and they clasped hands like comrades. Immediately Elizabeth wheeled about and laid the letters in the drawer. Then they sat down, Rosamond in a low chair obliquely to the fire, so that she faced them both. She had the flush of roses; her soft hair had tangled under her hood, and her eyes were full of light—the glow of youth and mounting spirits. She looked like an untouched thing, crowned with hope and all the promises. She laughed out, as if life were seeth-

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ing in her, overtopping the commonplace moment in a yeast of foam.

"I ran away," said she. "I telephoned for a carriage, and left mamma word that I was here with you. She was sleeping like a baby."

"Then she is better?" asked Helen, smiling at her with the delight of maternity itself in such embodied expectation.

"She is amazingly better. This is the first day I haven't been afraid. Dear—dears, both of you! when do you think Kent will be home?"

She looked from one to the other in a most obvious anticipation. Her premonitory joy was too great to admit of subterfuge. Elizabeth brusquely changed her attitude, and Helen answered:

"He's due a week from—"

"Due, Mrs. Markham! Please, please don't put it that way! Not when he ought to come, but when he's coming! I want certainties."



“‘NOW,’ SAID SHE, ‘LET’S TALK ABOUT KENT!’”

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Elizabeth rose and shook herself, as if she thrust away her own discomfort.

"I must go," she said. "I promised to be back at ten. But I'll come round to-morrow." She took Helen's hand, and then bent forward and kissed her. It was a rare caress, and the tears started to Helen's eyes.

Rosamond raised her pretty brows.

"Dear me!" said she, when Elizabeth had left the room. "Isn't Bess affectionate? I wish she'd expend some of her bottled ecstasy on me." She laughed, a low, joyous ripple, and slipped from her chair to the floor at Helen's knee. She laid her cheek on the older woman's hand and looked into the fire happily.

"Now," said she, "let's talk about Kent!"

It was an old topic; the ways of gilding it were understood between them.

"Well," said Helen, in the tone of beginning a fairy story, "Kent is a remark-

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able person. In the first place, he is a very magnificent war correspondent—”

“Yes, go on.”

“He is coming home all covered over with laurels—” She stopped, and her brows contracted.

“Yes, yes! *Continuez!*”

“I can’t, dear—I can’t!”

Rosamond lifted her head and looked up into Helen’s face. She was surprised, and that hint of piquant wistfulness gave her an added charm. The fire-light flushed her, and played upon the hue it made, and her hair fell deliciously about her face. She looked like a nymph in disarray. Helen, considering her, felt her own heart fail. The moment’s question, as it touched Rosamond, seemed unanswerable. This maiden-nature was a citadel not to be assailed by worldly compromise. She wondered whether knowledge of sin could enter it without defacing some pure shrine.

“What is it?” asked Rosamond. “You

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look as if you knew things you couldn't tell. It's not Kent? Something has happened to him, and you are keeping it from me!"

Helen laughed, with the false mirth that moves upon the surface of a hidden mood.

"Dear heart," said she, "how could I hear from Kent when he's on the ocean?"

"Not a word from him since that cable from Cape Colony?"

"Not a word, Rosamond."

The girl sighed a long breath and dropped her head again. Her gaze mused off beyond the fire.

"I am too happy," she said. "It makes me apprehensive. I never used to be afraid. But I suppose it's because I care so much. The earth seems like a bubble blown round Kent. What if it should break?"

"Don't be afraid. Whatever happens—"

The maid appeared at the doorway with

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a visiting-card. Helen took it, and by some chance movement dropped it, face upward, to the floor. Rosamond caught the name.

"Why," she cried, irrepressibly, "Jane Harding! I remember her. She gave Kent lessons—in botany, wasn't it, and composition?" She rose, and began patting her hair into place.

"Ask her to wait," said Helen to the maid. "Not in the hall. In the reception-room."

"I haven't thought of her for years," continued Rosamond, idly, stretching a foot out to the fire. "No, dear, I won't sit down again. Briggs ought to be here. I left word for him to come and walk home with me. I had to have a breath."

Helen rose precipitately, and Rosamond followed her gaze to the door. Jane Harding stood there, a thin, gaunt figure in meagre black. All her clothes were well calculated to withstand the disaster of

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more than ordinary wear; they might have been constructed for exacting journeys. They were scanty, exposing small surface to the wind. Her hat, of an Alpine shape outlawed by fashion, had a band of black; it was tied by ribbons under her chin. It would be impossible to describe her without caricature, and yet the woman, in her self-respecting decency, could never have provoked a smile. She merely belonged to another age, decried by servile fashion. She made a period of her own. Her face was the unconscious expression of a type: the thin hair drawn back and braided, the set mouth, the undaunted chin, and eyes overhung by the shiny forehead of an uncompromising intellectuality.

"I couldn't very well wait," said she; "so I came up."

Her voice was dry and colorless. All possible similes would be too warm beside its neutral quality. Her mouth worked as she talked, in the evident determina-

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tion to deliver words precisely. She seemed to be exercising them with a preliminary canter before she allowed them to emerge.

Rosamond turned on the new-comer one of her delightful smiles.

"You don't remember me, Mrs. Harding," said she. "I used to see you when I was a little girl."

Something moved the woman's face. It was not color so much as a pale, lunar image of emotion, and with the first brief flicker it was gone.

"It has been a long time," she responded, from a vague indifference—"a great many years."

Helen stepped forward.

"You will excuse me, Mrs. Harding," said she, her dignity admitting no appeal. "I shall have to ask you to wait for a few minutes. If you will step into the study there at the right—"

"No, no!" cried Rosamond, gathering

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up her cloak. "I'm going, dear; truly I must. But let me ask you this: mother has taken a great fancy to go down to Woodside as soon as she can be moved. May we?"

"Of course. The house is partially closed. Old Sam and Hannah are living in two rooms; but we'll have the fires started."

"So I told her. Still, she wants me to run down and see about it. I had to promise her. She's like a baby. I told her I'd go down to-morrow."

"Splendid! You need some country air. I'll telephone. You can take a maid."

"I may not be able to take anybody. We have lost one maid, and there is extra work. I can go perfectly well alone."

"I should be very happy to go down with you for the trip, Miss March," said Mrs. Harding, quietly. "I have always wanted to see Woodside again."

"Thank you," answered Rosamond, in

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a quick gust of gratitude. "Why, thank you!"

"It will not be necessary," put in Helen, conclusively. "I will telephone you tomorrow, Rosamond. Shall I ask if Briggs has come?"

"Please."

The girl slipped into her wrap, and stood hugging it about her with premonition of the cold. She looked like a celestial creature, all blue raiment and the hues of youth.

"Is Briggs down-stairs?" asked Helen of the maid.

"No, Mrs. Markham."

"Never mind, dear," said Rosamond. "I'll run home by myself. It won't take me ten minutes. I shall like it."

"I am going that way," remarked Jane Harding, with the same indifferent civility. "I should be very happy to walk along with you, Miss March."

"No, no!" said Helen, violently.

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"Rosamond, I shall telephone for a carriage. Mrs. Harding, come with me, please." She stood aside for Jane to precede her through the doorway, and the woman went, with scarcely a movement of her spare draperies.

"In there, if you please," said Helen, pointing with an authoritative grace to a closed portière. "Wait for me. I will call you."

At that moment Briggs was reported as having arrived below-stairs, and she summoned Rosamond. They said good-night at the front door, and, having seen her safely away with the old man-servant, Helen stood there a moment to collect herself, breathing the cold air and looking up at the uncountable stars. She was always helped by distance and the suggestion that this is a universe and not merely a world. Then, with the strength of larger life in her lungs, she went up-stairs again, to find Jane Harding.

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The portière had been pushed aside; but Helen, stepping into the shaded dusk of the study, found it empty. She went on to the door opening into the conservatory, and there she paused. Jane Harding stood in that flowery seclusion, lost to the world without. Save in her poverty-stricken outline, this was not the woman who had left the library five minutes before. She had imbibed life from something, and with it a semblance of the vigor that makes life sweet. She was drinking in the moist air of the place; but it was more than mortal breath that moved her so. A flush had risen to her face and speciously renewed it. Her rigorous mouth had softened. She was a different woman. Helen stood there in silence, not conscious of any purpose of espial, but merely confronting a situation she did not understand. At some slight movement of hers, Jane Harding came to herself with a start and saw her. She seemed to recall her ordinary

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mood, and with a gulp swallowed down engrossing passion. But she had to speak, and she did it frankly.

"I never saw such a sight in my life," she said, in a broken voice.

"You like the flowers?" asked Helen, gently. "Don't you want to go through that door and see the orchids?"

"Have you got orchids?" Some touch of nature had constrained her to put in the superfluous verb. Her previous speech had been all that could be desired by up-to-date grammarians disporting in contentious journals. That flashed upon Helen. She remembered how, in their other talk, Jane Harding had held to a rigorous "wouldn't you better," spoken with bravado. This advent of the real woman had been destructive. Old habit had pushed culture from the stage, and itself stood forth there nakedly.

"Yes," said Helen. "Go on. I'll follow you. There! open that door."

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Jane Harding stood in the bewildering spot where golden fortune had assembled strange similitudes of other life: flowers like birds, like butterflies, like snakes, like everything but flowers. She looked about her as if she saw all the riches of the kingdoms of the earth. The old story of caves lighted by jewels dazzling beyond belief had here its mate in this true happening of a mortal caught by a bewildering pageantry.

"My soul!" groaned Jane. "My soul!"

"Mr. Markham is very fond of orchids," ventured Helen, in puzzled explanation. "Not quite that, perhaps. It isn't so much the flowers; he enjoys collecting them."

"That's what money can do!" said the other woman, in a bitter outcry. "It buys you things like these. My God!"

Helen went up to her and laid a hand upon her arm.

"Orchids are not very important," she

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said. "I don't quite like them myself. They make me a little uneasy, they are so ostentatious."

"What do you mean by ostentatious?"

Helen felt the strangeness of the situation. They two had met on a tragical ground; but they now seemed, for no reason that yet appeared, to be considering, with equal intensity, something which had, in her mind, no weight at all. Orchids, she would have said, bore no possible significance, save as they absorbed money or cost life. But she was learning things about Jane Harding which, she was in some way convinced, could not be even guessed outside the orchid-house. She sat down on a step, and motioned the woman to sit also. But Mrs. Harding took no notice of the inviting gesture. She walked slowly back and forth, bending to one and another of the swart, freckled flowers, inhaling their look as if it were perfume.

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"Ostentatious!" said Helen, reflectively. "Why, I mean that to me they are remarkable things, which do not pay in the least for the trouble spent on them. They merely stand for money."

"To think them things are growing outside in the world and I can't get at 'em!" said Jane Harding, fiercely. Her grammatical armor had fallen from her. She was plain New England in a fret.

"But why do you want to get at them?"

"I want it because I want it," said the woman, hotly, turning upon her, and speaking as if she addressed, not her, but the God that made and starved or nourished flowers and women both. "I was born to want it. You look here! What kind of a life do you think I've lived? I married a sot. That's what he was—a sot. Lindy was like him, for all the world. They hadn't any principle. When he was alive, I sewed. But I was bound to rise. When he died, I studied till I passed the

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examinations, and then I got a few scholars. But there was just one thing I wanted. I wanted to teach botany. I fitted myself, and the system changed. They had microscope work then. I hadn't any microscope. I went back to sewing. Lindy went to the devil. I couldn't stop her. I kept her down when she was a little girl—so many hours' study, so many to sew. She wouldn't learn. She couldn't. She was a great disappointment." Her mouth closed in the lines of a savage, though not a passionate, memory.

"Poor Lindy!" breathed Helen.

"No child ever had a better bringing up," went on the woman, in an honest justification. "No child in the world. She was under my eye every minute I could keep her there. But she used to run away."

"I see."

"Well, that's all there is about it. She was handsome, and she was wild, and

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she went to the bad. After she died, I made up my mind I'd got to live my life. I wanted to study and cultivate myself. I wanted to travel."

"Ah!" said Helen, softly. "That's it!"

"I got hold of a book." Jane Harding spoke hurriedly now, with keen, dry emphasis. "It told how a woman went travelling about, painting flowers the eye of man hadn't seen. She went everywhere. She went to the Andes." She pronounced the word as if it indicated paradise.

"You want to go to the Andes! You want to paint flowers!"

"I want to see flowers," said the other, in a hungry tone. "I want to see 'em where they grow, and maybe paint 'em, and maybe not."

Her hard, thin visage was relaxing more and more. Helen saw how complex this craving was, made out of the best of her and the worst. The woman had an in-

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born longing for what New England calls culture. She would pursue it with unwearied foot, though it led her to the grave. This was acquisition of as real a sort as the amassing of property; if she had it in her mind, she would go about doling it out to women's clubs in dry little talks and the distribution of herbarium sheets among the audience. But there was another side to it, as clear as the stream of individual desire that flows into us all from the creative fount. Her passion was for flowers. It was inexplicable, it was illogical; but there it was. It might lead her hungering and thirsting through dull ways of study even over the Andes; but it would not be stilled until death had hushed her heart.

"I think it might be brought about," said Helen. Her face was illuminated with that satisfaction which lies in giving hunger what it wants, not what it needs. "If you long to travel, I believe it can be managed."

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The woman's face hardened into its old, set lines.

"I don't accept money," she said, now with her academic utterance. "I must pay my way."

"You asked for money. You demanded it."

"That was my just dues."

"For what?"

"It was my just dues for what I've been through with Lindy. She ought to have been a teacher and paid her way. Then we could have put something aside. She ate up everything I saved, one fashion or another. She made it fly. If she hadn't got finery to trail round in after Kent Markham, he never'd have noticed her. She speculated with my money to get him. She got him. Now he can pay me—you can—you are his folks—for all that followed, the shame and all. You can pay me."

Helen regarded her from a mood that

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turned her mouth to quivering sternness.

"Be honest," said she. "You don't think it's your just dues. You simply want something, and you are snatching at it. Then you invent a justification. You want to go abroad—"

"I must have something laid by, so I can go abroad with a free mind," said the woman, immovably. "I want my just dues."

"I think I might get money for that, if you would be patient. I have often been able to help people carry out their wishes. Not the sum you asked for; that isn't just. But I could send you abroad—"

"I don't want charity. I want my just dues."

"Why do you demand things?" asked Helen, impulsively. "That's no way to get them. Why do you tell me you must have a certain sum within a given number of days?"

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"You are afraid of my telling Rosamond March," said Jane Harding, briefly. "That's my only hold over you. If I wait till Kent comes home, I've got no weapon."

"How did you conceive this plan? How do you know Kent himself hasn't told her?"

"I saw her at church. I knew he hadn't told her."

Helen groaned. "And because she looks happy, innocent, untouched, you make use of her to threaten me!"

"You can pay me my just dues," said Jane Harding, implacably. "Then she needn't be told at all."

Helen sat and mused, and Mrs. Harding turned to the orchids; immediately again she grew transfigured. Her ordinary personality faded; it melted into a dreamy consideration of something more beautiful to her than any dream. Helen's thoughts were far afield. She was con-

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scious of a new partisanship. Jane Harding had become one of the army to be saved from judgment, and set on the road of doing good instead of ill. She recalled herself at sight of the woman's brooding attitude. It was like that of mothers above cradles.

"Pick some of them, if you like," said Helen. "Yes, I mean it. Pick them!"

"Pick 'em!" responded the worshipper, in a melting tone. It was grotesque, in misplaced pathos, like the endearments of childless women over makeshift pets. "Pick 'em! My soul! I couldn't pick 'em. Let 'em grow."

Her manner, like her voice, betrayed new gravity, and even some reproof. This might have been a woman who, in the midst of baby-worship, finds herself counselled by the colder bystander to shake the child into an admired animation.

"Those in the corner are very precious, I believe," said Helen, with a desultory

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wish to continue their mutual knowledge. "There is another my husband has never been able to find. He has a very interesting scheme, he and Mr. Graham Landor, the editor of the *Day*. They mean to send a young man to South America in search of that one plant. My husband is to furnish half the money and have the orchid. The young man is to write up his adventures, if he has any, for the *Day*." She spoke idly, with the courteous necessity she always felt to share conversation wherever two were gathered together. But the effect of that small commonplace amazed her.

"My Lord!" cried Jane Harding, all her defences gone again. "A man, of course! A man! That's what luck will bring. He couldn't do it a mite better than I could. I could find that plant."

"I believe you could," responded Helen, rising in admiration of her dash and cour-

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age. "Mrs. Harding, don't go home. Spend the night with me."

The woman looked at her in frank suspicion.

"You want to keep your eye on me," she said.

"That's not why I am asking you. I do want to keep my eye on you; but that's not it."

Jane Harding stepped past her with the determination of the drunkard who puts the cup aside. Without one glance behind, she walked through the conservatory to the room beyond. Helen followed, and outside the moist, heavy air, the breath of things she loved, Jane Harding faced her.

"I want my just dues," she said.

Helen sickened at her implacability. She recurred to a past issue, of no importance at the moment, save as it gave her better understanding of the woman.

"Why did you offer to walk home with

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Rosamond?" she asked. "Why did you propose going to Woodside with her?"

"To scare you." The words were cooler than their sense. "You would better learn how many ways I can find of seeing her alone."

The very meagreness and practicality of the woman were, in themselves, a terror. If she had looked the adventuress, a gypsy crone, a hag out of French fiction, even Helen might have put her in the hands of the police. She was a decent New England matron, of pedagogical ambitions and wandering blood, whose inward spirit, though it might outvie the martyrs, would veil itself in an impeccable decorum. This was the New England conscience turned to longing and to crime; but even in those byways it would act with its accustomed rigor. What Jane Harding had resolved upon, that she could be trusted to perform.

"Stay all night with me," urged Helen.

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"You may go in the morning. I sha'n't interfere with you."

"I guess you won't interfere with me," said Mrs. Harding, the free-born American's glint coming into her eyes. "I guess I should go home in the morning, for all anybody."

"The orchids are beautiful in the morning," ventured Helen, persuasively, "with the sun on them."

The Puritan faltered; the monomaniac triumphed.

"Well," said Jane Harding, weakly, "maybe I'll stay."

"Then excuse me one moment, and I'll show you to your room. Go back among the orchids, if you like. Turn on the light, there by the door."

Helen hurried out of the room, and ran across the hall to the telephone. Impulse, in trying situations, was her slave; sometimes it was her master. At the moment she could not tell whether this were wis-

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dom or mere daring. She called up Graham Landor at the office of the *Day*. He would be there, she knew, editing the morning paper.

"Is that you, Mr. Landor?" she asked. "Mrs. Markham! No, nothing is the matter. Nothing to trouble you. We are all well. Are you going home soon? Could you drop in to see me on the way? No, no news from him. The strike? No news. Can you come? Thank you."

She hung up the receiver, and stood there a moment, weighing her action. Graham Landor, Kent's friend, an old intimate of them all, had not entered the house for years. No one had told her why, and she had stilled her queries from an unexplained foreboding that the defection was to Graham's hurt. Now she wanted him, and, life being very simple to her, she called him. She brushed aside the possibility of un wisdom in her act, and with the excitement of anticipation upon

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her, went back to the study. It was empty. She smiled, and took her sanguine way through the conservatory to the orchid-house. It, too, was dark—a fragrant, warm seclusion.

“Didn’t you understand about the light?” she called. “Here. I’ll do it for you.”

Its brilliancy roused all the spotted things to living wonder. Struck out against the riven dark, they seemed like creatures newly made.

But Jane Harding was not there. Helen waited a moment, with an uncanny sense of listening for the breathing of a person she could not see. There was no sound. The ear, like the eye, refused to find her. Helen ran back through the rooms to the hall-window commanding the avenue. She threw up the sash and thrust out her head. A small figure was walking rapidly down the deserted mall. It was Jane Harding. She had decided not to spend the night there.

III

HELEN went back into the library and sat down by the fire. Again she was waiting, with an expectation intensified by what she had gone through. Recalling herself presently to practical needs, she summoned the maid and told her to have chocolate ready, and some food; when Mr. Landor came, he was to be sent up without delay. Then, with nothing to do until that moment, she leaned back in her chair and withdrew into compensating meditation. She had been a wife for years; and yet, in the habit of her fervent thought, she was a bride. When her husband was away, she had hours of still communion with him, made up of memories from their life together and also of that rapt con-

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sciousness for which there is no name. A hundred times a day she sent her soul to him with inarticulate messages: the thoughts that bless, the prayers like crystal globes of safety enclosing a beloved soul. Helen adored the man in a way including the far reaches of all being. It was not for this year or next that she kept troth with him; her desire ran forward towards unexplored delights, beseeching the unknown good to shower them on him. She was like a mother garnering up treasure for an improvident child, in expectation of his sometime desiring it.

It was nearly twelve when she heard Landor coming up the stairs. He appeared in the doorway unannounced: a tall fellow of sinewy bulk, with a firm chin, a hawk's eye, and a mouth too sensitive even in its strength to promise him the ease of poor contentments. He was a man who had seen service in life. His face betrayed it. The eyes were weary of

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gazing on things with which the hands had grappled.

Helen met him in a welcome artlessly compounded of new pleasure and unchanging fealties.

"I'm afraid you are tired," she said. "You don't run up-stairs as you used to."

He answered her smile, and in that irradiation his face turned sweet and boyish. Immediately she remembered how Kent had introduced him to her years ago; nobody, Kent said, was such a kid as Graham Landor.

"It wasn't because I didn't want to come," said he. "I *am* tired, dog-tired. But five minutes by the fire will set me right."

"You're going to have a tray. Sit down and wait for it."

But he could not compose himself. He walked to the window and back again, his hands in his pockets. He halted there before her.

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"Mrs. Markham," said he, impulsively, "what made you send? Has anything happened? Is it—Elizabeth?"

She looked up, surprised.

"Elizabeth? No, it's not about her. No, this is business."

He sat down, and the frown upon his face gave way delightfully.

"I didn't know," said he. "It's so long since I've been here—"

The maid came in with the tray, and Helen poured his chocolate. He took it absently, and she had to jog his interest.

"Come," she said. "Break bread with me."

Then he did eat, and the food cheered him. He shook off old preoccupations and gazed at her.

"Now," said Helen, putting down her cup, "this is why I summoned you. Is the plan still on for sending a young man orchid-hunting?"

A keener look ran into his eyes. He

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seemed to dismiss his intimate and personal soul in favor of an every-day intelligence.

"It is still on," he said.

"Have you found the young man?"

"No. We've considered six, but they're no good."

"What do you say to substituting for a young man a middle-aged New England woman?"

Landor looked at her through the dawning of a more inquisitive discernment. He took off his eye-glasses and wiped them. His eyes had immediately the softened look of the readjusted focus. A smile was coming, perhaps in recognition of acumen from a quarter whence he least expected it.

"I should consider it," he responded, temperately. "This is the day of woman; it's the day of the New England woman. Will she write in dialect?"

"She will write decorously, according to no one less than Lindley Murray."

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Momentarily her smile answered his, and then anxiety returned, to reassert itself. "Briefly, this is it. A woman I used to know has just been here. She worked for me years ago. She is delirious over orchids, and she wants to travel. Her mind is set on culture; but besides that she has the spirit of Borrow and Richard Burton rolled in one. She would hunt your orchids to the death—or anything else she set herself to hunt! I thought of your quest. I thought of you—of the woman—of myself. It's audacious; but then *you* are audacious."

"You are a splendid promoter. I didn't think it of you." He came upright in his chair, and flashed his sudden smile upon her. "Dear lady," said he, keenly, "why are you doing this?"

She had been deeply moved in speaking; he could not but be conscious of it. A fine reserve controlled her usually; she was accessible and sweet, open to all hu-

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man needs, yet always, as it seemed, behind a veil. Now something stirred her too poignantly to be ignored. She had an end in view; and, seeking it, her old fine sanity gave way to eager haste.

"I want to help the woman," she said. Her cheeks were scarlet now. Her eyes bent upon him entreatingly. "I want to feed the starved life she has been living. But it's more than that. It's more personal. I have another motive, and that I cannot tell you."

"Shall I do it because you ask me?"

She hesitated, and honesty stood by her.

"No," she answered. "No. Do it if she will sell your paper."

He looked at her a moment in silence. He was besieging her hidden reserves, speculating upon her warmth.

"Is Elizabeth"—he hesitated—"is Elizabeth concerned in this?"

"No!" She glanced at him in pure sur-

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prise. "Not directly." Then, candidly as she had spoken, this seemed to her a lie, and she added: "We are all concerned, more or less, in a way. But you are not to fash yourself with that. You are merely to decide whether the woman will do the work you want, and trust it to her."

"Can I trust her?" asked Landor, with knitted brows. "That's the question."

"You can trust her to do a piece of work like that. Her heart will be in it. So will her conscience."

"How do you know I can trust her?"

"I feel it."

"The mischief you do!" said Landor, shaking his head at her. "So we are to fit her out with a letter of credit, and expect her to come back with orchids and a manuscript of forty thousand words. Have you found her trustworthy?" he asked, suddenly, in direct attack.

She looked him in the eyes, her own gaze crystal-clear.

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"No," she said. "She has behaved abominably. I am afraid of her; yet I respect her very much. She has a distorted conscience; but I believe she'd let it lead her to the stake. She is cruel; but then, she has been starved."

"Starved? Poor? Is she poor?"

"Her soul is starved."

He shook his head.

"Dear lady," said he, "when you get to souls, you're outside my bailiwick. Well, let me see the creature. When can I meet her? Where?"

Helen seemed to palter.

"I don't know," she answered, weakly. "When she comes, when I see her, I can send her to you."

"She'll have to hurry, then. The scheme ought to be advertised in Saturday's issue." He was abstractedly fingering at the pull of the drawer; and for no reason, save that the letters were within, the action made her nervous.

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"Turn the key," she said, with a little laugh. "There! give it to me, please. Elizabeth put some papers in there and neglected to lock the drawer. They make me fanciful. I feel as if they might jump out and punish us—make faces at us—for being careless."

"Elizabeth!" he repeated, obeying absently. "Elizabeth! Has she been here to-night?"

Again Helen glanced at him, mutely questioning an emphasis disproportioned to the fact.

"Yes," she said, securing the key to her chatelaine. "Elizabeth came in for an hour."

A wave of feeling touched his face and then engulfed it. He threw himself back in his chair as if, recognizing the greatness of the emotion, he abandoned himself gladly.

"Mrs. Markham," he said, "I haven't seen Elizabeth for two years. We are in

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the same city, we might meet at any corner; yet I have not seen her."

"No," said she, softly, with a gentle interest, "we never see you now. We must amend that. You used to be here so much. Elizabeth would be sorry— Why, Graham! Gray!" Kent's old name for him came from her lips without premeditation.

He still sat there with eyes tight shut, and something about him—his attitude, his air—arrested her, forbidding further speech. His face, even under its suffusion, looked mature and worn. But presently his eyes opened to meet hers in sudden radiance. He smiled.

"Yes, Mrs. Markham," he said, "it was Elizabeth. It's always been Elizabeth. Didn't you know?"

"No," she breathed. "I never knew."

Landor sat upright, and a different spirit moved upon his face. It grew harder, yet with no ignoble stress. He looked as if he were savage over life alone.

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"This is a good time to make a clean breast of it," he said, recklessly. "I haven't confessed since my mother died. I'm tired enough to want to do it." The clock struck. "Twelve! Are you too much fagged? Could you sit here for half an hour and let me talk about Elizabeth? I never talk of her. I've no right to. She doesn't belong to me, though, Heaven help us, I belong to her. She's shut up inside me somewhere. God, Mrs. Markham! let her come out to-night. Let's talk her over." He looked like a man fired worthily by some passion, ready to say the things he might repent to-morrow. She leaned forward and laid a hand upon his arm. At that moment of impulsive sympathy he was as near to her as Kent, as much her own.

"Dear heart," said she, "of course we'll talk about Elizabeth."

"The most gallant girl there is!" he answered, as if it were a toast. "The most

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splendid, dear old girl! Of course I cared about her, Mrs. Markham. What did you think I came here for?"

"I thought you were Kent's chum."

"That was why I came at first. Then I saw her, and it was all over with me: for good, for life, I guess it is. It looks that way. But no wonder you didn't know. She was at boarding-school a lot. We wrote to each other. I hadn't asked her even, but she must have understood. Then it all came out about the land frauds—you know, Mrs. Markham."

"I know a little," she hesitated. "My husband told me—" There she stopped.

His brows darkened; he looked old.

"Your husband was quite right," he said. "It was pretty tough at the time; but he was right. How much do you remember about it, anyway?"

"I believe there was a newspaper scandal—" Again she paused.

"You don't like to say it? You may.

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I'm used to it. I've thought it times enough. This is how it was. My father had an elaborate and fraudulent scheme for making money out of the Arable Land Company. He had the stock, he had the stockholders. He had everything but the land. Your husband found it out. He exposed us. He wrote us up succinctly for the papers. Kent might have done it brilliantly; but he refused. Meantime, while my father was being disgraced, I was in love with Bess."

"He couldn't have known," she cried, swiftly. "My husband didn't know—"

"Dear lady," returned Landor, gently, "he did know; but he was quite right. I went to him and told him. I urged him to delay a little, and let me see if I could get my hand on the helm. I had an idea I might save a smash, and give every man his own, without disgrace. I told him so. But he refused. Justice had got to be done, he said; it must be done quickly."

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A groan burst from her lips. Landor forestalled her words.

"Dear Mrs. Markham, do you suppose I'd tell you this if I didn't believe he was right? I didn't think so at the time. I thought he was a devil. For I told him I wanted Bess, and I begged him to leave me my good name to offer her. And he refused. Well, my father died. No, I don't think that hastened it. The Land Company failed. Your husband had smashed it. The widows and orphans who trusted us went to the wall. My father left me some money. I decided, rightly or wrongly, I don't know which, that the stockholders were not my business. I bought the *Day* and worked like a beaver on it. But the tougher struggle I had—" he spoke musingly, looking into the fire.

"Yes," said Helen, eagerly—"yes!"

He glanced up at her with his quick, responsive brightness. He looked like a lov-

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able boy, and her heart warmed to him anew.

"Mrs. Markham," said he, "you may think me a sentimentalist; but the more I struggled, the more certain I was that I'd got to shoulder the stock of the defunct Land Company."

"Of course you did!" she cried, as if it were a triumph of her own. "Oh, what splendid things men are!"

He shook his head.

"No," said he, whimsically. "No. I wasn't a splendid thing. I wasn't even irreproachable in the way I'd climbed. I was having some sort of success, and I couldn't have had it so soon if I hadn't got it through setting my feet on the faces of other men. Or, rather, my father had set his feet there, and I climbed on what he left me. But when it dawned on me that I'd got to pay his debts—Jove! wasn't I disgusted when that came over me!—I had to work all the harder. But I've grubbed,

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and I've lived plainly, and now I'm feeding the maw of an insatiate monster called the stockholders of Arable Land."

"Dear boy," she said, the mother in her all awake, "how proud we ought to be of you! And Bess! Have you told Bess?"

He looked at her in plain surprise.

"Why, no," said he. "I never have told Bess. How could I? I've nothing to offer her. The money I earn goes to Arable Land. I have nothing on earth to offer Bess but a name, and that is smirched."

"Smirched! Let us see what she says to that. Let us see what my husband says."

"Mr. Markham said everything he had to say on that head in the beginning," returned Landor, dryly. "We talked that over when I put my first plea to him. He told me then that I was of bad stock, tricky through and through. I was furious. Yes, Mrs. Markham, I was. But in

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the course of a year or so I came to the conclusion that maybe he was right. I thought possibly a fellow more seaworthy, more tautly built, might not have been willing to inherit money made as my father made it. Oh yes, I knew pretty well what his schemes had been: I knew they'd pass muster in Wall Street, but not under the Mosaic law. I was 'of bad stock.' I was, you see! So, having recognized it, I walked Spanish. I toed the line. There are no tricks to be laid at my door, Mrs. Markham." He looked her in the face, smiling again in his boyish way, but speaking with a homespun honesty quite devoid of pride. "I watch myself," he added. "I can't afford to skulk. I don't dare to. But Bess! Oh, ye gods! how young I feel to be in a room where Bess has been—and isn't.

'Only to kiss that air,'"

he sang,

"'That lately kissed thee!'"

JUDGMENT

He was chaffing his emotions, yet they mastered him. Hunger looked from his eyes. Helen felt her throat constrict in poignant sympathy.

"Gray," said she, "we shouldn't have let you bear all this alone."

"Oh, you couldn't have helped it!" he returned, quite simply. "A man has got to meet his life himself. What could any of you have done?"

She was silent; but she knew what they might have done. She saw him accepted at the house, for Kent's sake and his own, and fancied him working out his destiny as he had wrought it, yet not uncompanied. Many things were made plain to her in that moment. She knew why Bess had gone away from home rather than take bread from her father's hand. And all this was not because John Markham had dealt justly, but because he had not remembered mercy. And recalling Elizabeth's bitter cry against him, she saw judg-

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ment walking towards him, and involuntarily put out both hands as if to ward it off.

"What is it, Mrs. Markham?" Landor was asking with concern; and then she realized that she had been in that mystical world of hers where souls seemed ever battling; and that she must come out and meet the moment. But her eyes were wet, the lashes clogged by tears.

"Don't be bothered," said Landor. "Why are you so sorry?"

She could not tell him without betraying the man for whom, in his own judicial arrogance, she was most sorry; but she said, in a sad commonplace:

"It has been unnecessarily hard for you. If we had known—if we had stood by you—it need not have been so hard."

"Not a bit of it," he responded, in his easy manner. "It's been good for me, mighty good. It toughened me. Keep it to yourself, Mrs. Markham. Don't tell.

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I shouldn't have broken down like this, but I know you never tell. Kent used to say so. By-the-way, when do you expect him?"

She told him, and the date brought up the vision of Jane Harding.

"I should like to see Kent," said he, musingly, looking into the fire. "I wish we could go back a few years and have a little fun—all hands round—everybody trusting everybody else."

"I don't see why it should have separated you and Kent," she ventured, humbly. She dared not speak of Bess.

He looked at her in frank surprise.

"Why, I was huffy, Mrs. Markham!" said he. "Was it temper, though, or was it pride? My father had been called a sneak, and I was the son of a sneak. I forswore the whole troop of you. All but Bess—dear old Bess! Well, that's enough of her to-night. When can I see your 'peripatetic, very magnetic' orchid-hunt-

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ress?" He rose and stood looking down at her.

"I can't let you undertake that," said Helen, suddenly.

"Why?"

"Because it benefits me—it benefits us."

"Gammon! Let me see the woman and judge. I sha'n't take her unless she'll do the trick. Can't afford it. I've got to think of Arable Land."

Helen had risen, and they clasped hands. She was looking at him in a mute petition, and he interpreted it.

"No, bless you," said he, "don't bother. You women always think things can be reconstructed, patched up, pieced on again. They can't. I am simply a confirmed bachelor devoted to Arable Land. I have wedded a lost cause. It's a doge and Adriatic business. But Bess! she's the miniature I carry in my pocket, to take out, once in a while, when my lawful spouse

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isn't looking. Good-night, dear lady. Keep my secrets. By-the-way—" He turned back to her. Humor was in his eye. "What a hard old brick your husband is!" He said it warmly, and her own heart leaped to meet the word. "I don't know another soul honest enough to tell a fellow he's the son of a scurvy knave, and then propose this orchid scheme to him, because he thinks the fellow's got the dash to carry it through. I'm not good enough for his daughter; but he likes my pluck, and he's absolutely unconscious of ever having hurt me. He adores the harrow—justice. He thinks the toad adores it, too."

Helen put a detaining hand upon his arm.

"Have you told him?" she ventured. "Does he know you are paying them back?"

"Bless you, no! That's where my obstinacy comes in. I haven't curried favor."

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"I must tell Bess!" She spoke firmly, with some apprehension of being withstood.

"No, you won't tell anybody. That's the beauty of you. I've asked you not to. Bess! She's the last person. I couldn't give her a crust."

"If she cares for you, she'll wait."

"Wait! I should be Methuselah, my shoe-strings blowing into my eyes. And perhaps—perhaps she never cared."

He ran down-stairs, and she heard the door bang behind him. The sleepy maid came in to turn off the lights, and Helen went to her own room, refusing further tendance. There she looked at her bed as the last place likely to interest her. She was keyed to an amazing pitch, and life seemed too precious to be spent in sleep.

The remnant of the night ran quickly, broken by nightmares like forebodings, and morning found her hungry for its face.

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While she dressed she had a servant telephone the house at Woodside. There was no response, and, with visions of an inhospitable country hearth, she went herself to call up Rosamond and forbid her going. Briggs answered at the telephone.

"She has gone, Mrs. Markham. She took the early train."

"Gone to Woodside!" repeated Helen. "Did she go alone?"

"A person called for her," returned the man. "I didn't catch the name—"

"Find out. Find out!" cried Helen, fiercely, in unreasoning certainty; and the voice came back:

"A Mrs. Harding, ma'am. A Mrs. Harding."

IV

HELEN turned away from the telephone, and called for her out-door wraps. The maid who brought them, startled by her face, reminded her of breakfast. That fact of concrete living steadied her; she dropped her cloak, and, pinning her hat on as she went, hurried into the dining-room. There to the accompaniment of an open fire, with its complex messages, peace awaited her. The room had that subtle air of serene living due to careful service. The table was exquisitely prepared with an access of devotion by servants who wrought for her the more religiously while John Markham was away because they knew she pined a little. None of the slighter accessories had

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been forgotten; there were flowers, and the morning paper lay beside her plate. But to Helen, in her present haste, none of the uses of life were more than the garments covering life itself. She hardly noted the sweet invitingness of the room, but poured herself a cup of coffee and drank it hastily. The maid, in a deferent concern, brought her the rolls, and then ventured:

"Mrs. Markham, you must eat."

Helen thanked her.

"Call a carriage, Lydia," said she.

"Yes, I'll eat. Don't be worried."

When the carriage came, Helen was cloaked and ready, and sufficiently alive to present fact to note the anxious query in the woman's face.

"I am going to Woodside, Lydia," said she. "Miss March has run down to open the house. We shall be back to-night. Tell Miss Elizabeth."

Half-way down the stairs she paused, with a thought of the letters where she

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had left them in the table-drawer. They distracted her; she had no use for them; yet, afraid to trust them to unfriendly circumstance, she ran back, unlocked the drawer, thrust them unwillingly into a little bag, and slung it on her wrist. She hurried down again, and the woman opened the door for her. A gust of sleet struck them in the face. This was a storm!—winter in the midst of spring. It seemed like a new battle to fight; but presently Helen began to feel the calmness born of movement after pure foreboding. The fact that Rosamond and Jane Harding were together in dangerous solitude was one to be met, not to be shuddered at; she must simply follow, to avert unhindered conclaves—and she was following.

The road to Woodside, after it passes the city limits and a line of dirty suburb, runs through marshes of great amplitude. To Helen, the journey had always been

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a progress full of wonder upon wonder. Short as it was, it healed her spirit, as sojourns do in foreign lands, or calm sea voyages. From these salt plains she drew some nourishment, through a sense beyond the sight. She had been born near the sea, and perhaps young vigor wakened in her at the portals of its look and smell; however it was, they heartened her. To-day she longed for the marshes, and, ignoring the carful of travellers, kept her glance upon the outer day, to suck sustenance from it as of old. But the storm refused her that communion. The sleet, riding like dust upon a mastering wind, hid the world away, and she tried vainly to reach out even the hand of memory to touch her marshes as they used to be, warm under sunset skies, with rose lagoons and creeping tides. It was like the withholding of a much-loved face; and when she reached the little station she was keyed to prescience of a moment she must

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dominate alone, without the aid of her familiar guardians.

There was no carriage at Woodside. A ramshackle carryall was accustomed to rattle up from the village intermittently in winter weather, and she searched the snowy highway for it. The station-master, plunging about in the oilskin and sou'wester that disclosed him as he was, a fisherman sacrificed to inland life, explained that the carryall had been there, but had gone down to the Place to take Rosamond March.

Woodside was unspoiled. It delighted in Christian names, and used them generously.

"Was Miss March alone?" asked Helen. She wrapped her cloak about her, prepared to struggle with the gusts.

"No, there was another woman—one o' the help, I guess. Mother in Israel! you don't say you're goin' to walk?"

"I mustn't wait!" she called back,

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piercingly. "The storm won't hurt me—nor the snow."

"This wind 'll cut ye like a knife"—she heard the voice come warning after her—"down on the cassy—"

The cassy, in the local speech, was the causeway connecting inland Woodside with the Place, John Markham's summer home. His house looked towards the east. Behind it was a smooth extension of the harbor, and fronting it the sea.

Helen took the road impetuously. She put down her head, and felt herself, like a cleaving prow, pushing the air and parting it. She was clipper-built, but her cloak flew back, fluttering distressfully, and when she raised her head for breath the sleet was cruel to her. She took the causeway at a struggling run. The snow threw gauntlets in her face, the sea-wind battled her, and little waves curled over the parapet to crowd her inland. She had never seen the tide so high, though mem-

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ory, that seemed to come in gusts now like the wind, recalled old tales of a day before the causeway had been built, when Woodside, in angry times, had been an island. Beyond the causeway the road curved slightly and eased her from the wind, and presently she toiled into the orchard-ground of Woodside Place. No other spot on the New England coast had equal beauty, because Woodside was a miracle of trees. There were orchards of great ancientry and groves of evergreen. The apple-trees were twisted, their faces turned one way from long submission to the wind; but they had obstinate vigor. Faithful to the seasons, under all calamity, they bore bloom and ripened fruit, and lent the spot the double enchantment of moving leaves under the tang of salt sea-air. To-day, constant in their old associations, they were friends. The marshes had failed her; the trees, in a more humble fashion, kept the tryst of memory.

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The house, the great comfortable creature she had known in happy intimacy, loomed darkly through the snow; its yellow walls looked dim to her. It was her husband's treasure, his delight; he had built it for their dual use, and she sobbed stumbling up the steps, to feel the nearer him. She opened the great front door and stepped in, the wind with her in an onslaught that tore at curtains and blew the ashes on the hearth. There in the hall was Hannah, toiling under wood, kindling, and pine-cones.

"The Lord above!" remarked the woman. "Ain't this the crowner?"

Hannah was a short, square body of great strength, who loved the world and all the uses of it. To kindle a fire like this, in haste, was like a swift adventure to her; she loved to cook, and tend the sick, and because she was strong all service seemed to her like play. She had a tanned face with high cheek-bones, of the

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aboriginal type, and two rows of white, firm teeth. Her hair was gray, and her dark eyes held glints of satire. Hannah put down the wood-basket and offered Helen a hand in equal clasp.

"What set you out to come down here," she inquired, "such a day as this?"

Helen laid both her cold hands about that stronger one, and gained some comfort from it. The question was ready on her lips.

"Have they come?"

"Rosamond March? Yes. She brought down that woman that used to have the class—but there, you know. Rosamond's as wild as a hawk. Never see such a storm, she said. Nothin' would do but she must climb up over the cliff an' watch the waves come in. I told her she couldn't see her hand afore her face; but there! I've started up a fire in the furnace. In half an hour it 'll take some holt. You come in the kitchen—"

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"Where is Sam?"

"Sam's been called to Portland to see that brother o' his that has the pip reg'lar as the spring comes round, an' then goes marchin' up May Hill, and has it all over ag'in next year."

"Are you alone, Hannah?"

"Law, yes! I admire to be. I can feed the critters, can't I? Sam took both hosses up to the stable afore he went. Your husband said he could, if 'twas more convenient. Where you goin'?"

Helen was at the door.

"I'm going to find Miss Rosamond. Get up your fires, Hannah. We'll be back." She was out in the storm again, and Hannah, her mouth agape with interrupted news, closed the door behind her.

Then the woman, merry over the influx of new life, went off to light her fires. Excitement seldom blew this way in wintry weather; she adored it.



"THEY WERE LOOKING DOWN INTO THE VOID BELOW
THEM"

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Helen took the bleak path over the hill to the cliff defending Woodside from the outer sea. Long before she reached them, she guessed out the two figures through the snow; they were looking down into the void below them, pondering over it; the surge was only a voice now, wallowing there in its own clamor. Until she came upon them, they were not aware of her.

"Rosamond!" she called. "Rosamond!"

The girl turned upon her a cold-nipped face. Even in that spent moment Helen told herself it was an untroubled gaze. Jane Harding, there beside her, was a monolith in black. She had tied a veil over her hat, and her clothes seemed to be wrapped about her by the storm concurrent with her self-enfolding will. Rosamond's hands were upon Helen's shoulders. She was calling to her:

"We came to see the waves, but there aren't any. There isn't any sea. Only a

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noise! They're drowning in a great white gulf there. But hear them thunder! Hear them boom!" She was ecstatic after her imprisonment in the house and the routine of the sick-room.

Jane Harding had turned with no surprise, and now she stood awaiting, in a civil fashion, the signal of their movements. In the midst of this hurly-burly she suggested a strange stillness, like that of things inanimate. She was not, Helen realized, in a maze, the creature anticipation had so clothed in terrors; now, face to face, she was bewildering in her simplicity, a practical person of commonplace demeanor. Yet she was a fact.

"Come down!" called Helen, in response. "We shall get our deaths here. Come!"

They left the voices crying in the gulf, and the wind swept them home. The fire in the hall had been heaped high with logs that tested even Hannah's strength.

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Helen, with her instinct of courtesy, turned to Jane Harding, the unfamiliar guest.

"Take off your things," she said. "Come to the fire."

Jane Harding, apparently unmoved by winter weather, untied her hat, and began unbuttoning her jacket with steady hands.

"Thank you," she said. "I will remain a spell."

They sat down beside the hearth, and Hannah brought them steaming lemonade. Rosamond's tongue ran fast. She looked like the spirit of the storm, animated through its wildness and untouched by chill. She sipped the hot drink, and Hannah chuckled to herself and urged the fire.

"I can't imagine why we don't come down in February," said Rosamond. "Why not in January? Why don't we stay right through?" The delicate bloom of her cheeks had hardened into red. The sleet, melting on her yellow hair, curled it

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the tighter. "A day like this takes ten years off you in ten minutes."

"How old are you now?" asked Helen, in a wistful fondness. "Eight?"

"Ten, at the most, dear, on a day like this. Hannah, what a great old fire! Mrs. Harding, you're not drinking!"

The goblet stood untasted on a table at the woman's hand. Immediately Helen knew why. Jane Harding would accept neither bite nor sup from the creditors who were yet to pay her those just dues.

"Won't you have a cup of tea?" suggested Helen, in her untired solicitude. "Hannah will make it for you."

"I am not accustomed to take anything this time of the day," returned the woman, in a stiff denial disproportioned to the circumstance; it sounded like an article of faith.

"It was so good of you to come!" said Rosamond, including the alien in her joy. "But you, Mrs. Markham, weren't you a

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dear to follow after! What do you think mamma said? She was in great shape when I left, greedy as possible for me to get some fun out of it. I might stay all night, if I liked. I suspected her, then. 'You didn't want me to run down to open Mrs. Markham's house,' I said. 'You wanted me to have a lark.'"

"I thought of that myself," owned Helen. "But we won't stay all night. We're better off in town, in storms like this."

"It's a well-built house," said Jane Harding, quietly. "There's a cellar underneath. It's likely to be warm."

Rosamond raised her brows and pursed her lips.

"Let's stay all night!" she coaxed.

Helen rose conclusively; she was warmed at the surface, but her veins ran chill.

"Hannah," said she, "we'll go over the rooms now. I may suggest some changes for Mrs. March's coming. No, Rosamond,

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no. We won't spend the night. You don't want to leave your mother, child; she's sick in bed."

Rosamond looked wilful, in her smiling way.

"It isn't like an ordinary illness, dear. Mamma was as game as you please this morning. 'What's breaking a hip?' she said. 'You never would have been so frightened if I hadn't ventured to get up a touch of fever.' And it's true, you know. She's all right, bless her, only bored! Oh, let's stay all night!"

Helen's gentleness pitted itself against that laughing will. "Now, Hannah," she said. "Mrs. Harding, you will excuse us, won't you, while we do these necessary things? You will find a lot of books there in the library. Come, Rosamond."

But half-way up the stairs, with Rosamond and Hannah, she turned to find Jane Harding following them.

"I should be pleased to go over the

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house," said Mrs. Harding, in a decent gravity no one could resent. "I haven't seen it since I used to come here to sew."

Helen opened her lips in quick denial, and then closed them and went on. It was evident to her that as she did not intend to leave Jane Harding alone with Rosamond, so the woman did not propose leaving Rosamond alone with her.

They made slow progress through the rooms, where new heat was softening the winter's chill, Helen giving desultory directions, as needless as their visit here. Hannah knew her business. At a day's notice she could slip the house into its holiday dress, and she heard superfluous counsel now with a cheerful calm, the depths of her mind quite unmoved by the necessity for remembering it. The silent figure followed, until Helen, nervous under tension, cut the conclave short.

"That's all, Hannah," she said. "Come, Rosamond!" A courteous thought con-

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strained her. "Come, Mrs. Harding!" she added, the more gently because her mind revolted. "Come down by the fire. Hannah, give us an early dinner—eggs, anything you like. We'll telephone the station for a carriage, and get off at three."

Then like a continued dream they were again sitting before the fire in the enforced intimacy of a country-house when doors are closed by storm, and there is one world within and an alien one outside, not to be penetrated. Jane Harding sat rigidly upright in her chair; she was a compendium of all properties. Her calm assaulted Helen like a challenge. It became at once imperative to change that rigorous attitude to normal uses, lest it break out in clamor. She went into the library, and came back presently with a book rich in colored plates.

"Here is the *Flora of Brazil*," said she. "Wouldn't you like to look it over?"

Mrs. Harding, masking her desires, took

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the book but coldly; there was no lure too small to wake suspicion in her. But with the turning of a page she was lost; mania hurried her, hot-foot, off to the land of heart's desire. Rosamond got up, drowsy with the warmth and her early rising, and opened the piano in the library.

"Do you mind?" she asked, and Helen shook her head. Hannah, at the first notes, came from the kitchen to announce, whole-heartedly:

"It was tuned last week." And then the girl began to play.

Helen sat and watched Jane Harding. She wondered what the music meant to her. It evidently meant nothing save, perhaps, an accompaniment to her breathless roving in Brazil. She was absorbed. A slow red stole into her dry cheeks, and her hand was eager upon the turning page. She held the book as if she loved it; and yet it was not that she loved. It was her own vicarious wandering.

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Rosamond blurred through snatches of English ballads, and then, challenged by the fighting day without, struck into the "Fire Charm." She had some mastery of music, and the spirit of this compelling thing awoke and answered her. The potency of it roused Helen to responsive clamor of the nerves that call to action. Life was at once heroic, peopled by gods who make sad abnegation and yet triumph because they have the blood of gods, and of mortals who are not denied the everlasting roads. At that moment there was slight difference between the two: gods and men were mingled on immortal fields, or earthly grounds destined, through combat, to become immortal. Ardency awoke in her to be faithful to great appeals, and to summon souls she loved to share that loyalty. For no reason she could formulate, she took the package of letters from the bag depending from her wrist, where they had hung like lead, and slipped the



“ ROSAMOND BLURRED THROUGH SNATCHES OF ENG-
LISH BALLADS ”



JUDGMENT

string. At the sound, Jane Harding's eyes forsook the page. The sight recalled her, even from Brazil.

"What you going to do?" she asked, in a swift, natural elision.

Helen had unfolded one of the sheets and dropped it on the fire. She did not answer. Then she slipped another from the pile and laid it also there. The words still quivered on brown pages as if, through wilful malice, they defied the flame.

"I don't know why I'm doing it," said Helen, suddenly, rousing herself and burning another letter. "I don't want such things to live. They mean wrong and cruelty: the wrong of other people—your cruelty."

"Well," said the woman, briefly, "they're only copies."

"No matter. They are better out of the world."

The "Fire Charm" was weaving towards its end, full of little cleansing flames

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in stern yet merciful encircling. Helen, with her inward eye, saw the scene as she had a hundred times: the Valkyr prostrate, strength in expiation, the fire rippling on and rising in obedience to inexorable will. Jane Harding also turned her head and listened momentarily. This had but thrust her mind into another path of thwarted longing.

"I got Lindy an instrument," she said. "She wouldn't learn. I kept her at it." The futility of setting the tools of life in motion seemed to strike her then, and her mouth worked meagrely.

Helen laid the last of the letters on the fire.

"I thought maybe you'd want to show 'em," said Jane Harding, in practical reminder. "You might read some of 'em to your daughter, or to Rosamond's mother."

Helen was studying her in a wistful unbelief; something imploring was in it also,

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as if she begged the woman's angel to come forth and show itself.

"Well, I've got the ones these were copied from," added Mrs. Harding. "I could show 'em to her." She nodded towards the room where the "Fire Charm," returned upon itself, through cunning evolution, was again beginning. "I could do that any minute."

"Have you brought those letters with you?" At once Helen's eyes sought a black bag on the floor. Now she remembered that the woman had been carrying it on the way down from the cliff; she had taken it up-stairs with her. It had not left her hand.

"No, they're not in there. That's crackers."

"Crackers?"

"I brought my luncheon. You didn't think I'd eat here, did you? I pay my way."

Yet she was demanding ten thousand

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dollars. Helen thought, with an unbelieving awe, of crackers and that adventurous will in combination.

"You have been very careful of the bag," she said, in a quick logic of suspicion.

"I like to keep things by me."

Helen brooded, and the woman answered her unspoken thought.

"I'd just as lieves tell you where the letters are. They're on me, in a good stout pocket. There they'll stay, unless they're taken off my dead body."

Hannah crossed the hall, carrying a log to the library fire. With her short stature and her evident strength, she looked like an unclassified creature born to do tasks, gigantic ones, underground or where nature moves in rude, cyclopean ways. Jane Harding's eyes followed her. Proud satisfaction brightened them.

"She couldn't take 'em off of me," she added. "Nobody could."

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The music ceased, in the lulling of an acquiescent will, and Rosamond came back, as Hannah paused before them to announce the early dinner. Helen rose.

"Come, Mrs. Harding," she said.
"Come, Rosamond."

"I am much obliged," returned the woman. Her hand lay suggestively on the black bag. "I don't eat any to speak of in the middle of the day."

"You must eat. Come."

Jane Harding had returned to her book with a finality befitting a greater question. Helen stood for a moment in an anxious urgency; then she put her arm through Rosamond's, and they went out together. Rosamond's face was puckered whimsically; her chance companion piqued her into wonder. She had met merely Kent's old teacher. She had found a mystery.

"Isn't she discouraging?" she ventured to whisper in the seclusion of the dining-

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room. "She's depleting. She seems to sap me, somehow."

"Don't, Rosamond!" said Helen, sharply. Jane Harding was every instant growing before her vision, greatening in power, in implacability worse than malice. She feared the woman's ordinary senses; even that small whisper might be heard, and then she would strike Rosamond.

"Why, no," said Rosamond, wondering. "I won't."

Helen roused herself to talk, and Hannah, in her homely sufficiency, helped on the moment. She had evolved a good dinner, and she served them featly, meantime rehearsing the annals of her snowy world.

"Sha'n't I take her in a cup o' tea?" she asked, nodding towards the quarter where Jane Harding, in her silence, was as significant, in some strange way, as if she called them all impartially.

"Yes, Hannah, yes," said Helen. "Take her a tray."

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Hannah brought back the tray untouched. Her face disclosed a hopeless wonderment. "She must have su'thin' by her," she said, briefly. "She's all over crumbs."

Then the talk faltered, none of them knew why, and presently they were rising from the table. Helen summoned back her energies.

"Now, Hannah," she said, "telephone the station for the carryall. Tell them for the three-o'clock. Promptly, Hannah, without fail."

Hannah was a long time about it. When she came back, joy, decently suppressed, was in her face.

"I can't get 'em," said she. "I can't get anything. No wonder, with this tempest blowin'. The wires must be down. You'll have to stay all night."

"Rosamond," cried Helen, sharply, "we must walk."

Rosamond stood by the fire, poking at

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it with an impetuous foot. She, too, like Hannah, was on the side of the storm; but the gravity of Helen's face constrained her to keep silence. Hannah was putting on her shawl and hood. Helen mutely questioned her.

"I'll go an' take a look at the cassy," said the woman. "Unless I miss my guess, you won't step foot on it this night. The waves are breakin' over the road now, I'll warrant ye."

Rosamond's young blood awoke. "Let me!" she cried. "Oh, Hannah, let me go! Give me your shawl. Please, Mrs. Markham! I'll be back in no time."

She bundled herself into hood and shawl, a laughing caricature.

"Go out at the side door," said Helen. "Don't—" She was about to add, "Don't let her see you," but she suppressed the impulse, and shook herself awake again to common-sense. Yet her revolting nerves warned her not to let Jane Harding fol-

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low Rosamond again into that bleak solitude.

Rosamond stepped out through the side door into the storm.

"She's a beauty," remarked Hannah, admiringly, picking up the dishes. "Kent done well that time. 'Most as well as his father did afore him."

Helen waited in silence, leaning her head against the pane. It was impossible to encounter Jane Harding again, with the prospect of their spending a night together under the same roof; she waited for the verdict, and watched the storm. It had risen, if that could be, after so wild a rout. The snow was harder now and finer, tiny frozen pellets that besieged the windows and threshed the orchard trees. A tragic portent, in what seemed awful nearness, roared and boomed the sea.

"Hannah," she said at last, out of her foreboding, "do you think something is going to happen?"

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Hannah glanced sharply at her from under knitted brows.

"I guess what 'll happen to you 'll be a cold on your lungs," she said, practically. "You better not stir out o' this house to-night. I'll soak your feet. You don't look any too rugged this spring, anyways."

Helen had not heard. She was quivering under the misery of homesickness.

"You need cossetin'," said Hannah, tenderly. "When's he comin' back?"

Tears sprang to Helen's eyes, out of past longing grown acutely new.

"Soon, Hannah, soon, I hope," she answered, softly. But the mention of John Markham soothed her nerves, risen in that complex rebellion.

Rosamond was coming. The wind had whipped her blood into a gallop; she seemed to bear the best of news. Outside the window she saluted Helen, like a soldier, and then came stamping in.

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"I've won!" she cried. "We don't go home to-night."

Helen had paled. The blood engulfed her heart; her vision darkened.

"The sea—" she faltered.

"It's simply raging over the footway. We couldn't do it even if we drove. But it's all right, Mrs. Markham. Mother 'll know the reason. Hannah, here's your shawl."

Her snowy things off, she turned to lay a cheek to Helen's in a laughing triumph. Helen had pulled her energies together.

"Then we'll stay," she said, accepting destiny. A wan smile was on her face. "Hannah, Miss Rosamond will sleep in my room. Give Mrs. Harding the east chamber."

With Rosamond's hand on her shoulder, the girl singing a marching-song, she went back to the hall fire where Jane Harding was absorbedly copying the picture of a flower on a piece of wrapping-paper. At

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that a vestige of some warmer hope came upon Helen.

"So you can draw, Mrs. Harding!" she said, involuntarily. "That's good. That's splendid."

"Some things I can," responded the woman, in an obvious pride, but without an answering glance. "I can draw flowers."

They left her at her task, and the afternoon went as time in the country does under a darkened sky. Rosamond was everywhere, like a spirit. She played more music; she gossiped with Hannah in the kitchen, and even made candy there, and came in triumphant, with a sticky plateful. Then it was supper-time, and Helen could not eat because Jane Harding would not; and Rosamond went to the barn with Hannah, to "feed the critters." After that she returned to the library fire where Helen was hovering, and reported that she had had a beautiful time.

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"But you've had a horrid one," she added, in a swift remorse. She took the place she liked at Helen's knee. "I am a selfish pig. I shall be punished."

"Mrs. Harding must come in here," said Helen. Her hand was on Rosamond's hair in the soft pity mothers feel. "Ask her to come."

Jane Harding had heard, and before Rosamond could rise she had appeared, in her noiseless way, and melted into a chair in the background.

"Come nearer," said Helen. "Draw up, as Hannah says. She must come, too. We must be sociable, a night like this. Where is Hannah?"

"She's got 'a sight o' things to do,'" said Rosamond, drowsily. She rested her head on Helen's knee and mused into the fire. "Don't you hear her pounding about overhead? She said you got a chill this morning, and you'd have to be he't up. There, that's a shiver! Are you cold?"

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Helen was cold chiefly from within. Yet she moved nearer the fire, to get the brightness of it.

"Are you quite warm?" she turned to ask Jane Harding.

"I am very comfortable, I thank you," said the woman, and her voice sounded as if she would rather not be comfortable, if, by privation, she might purchase her just dues.

The storm came gustily now, in sharp attack and specious lulling; it was silent only to be heard anew. It whipped the pane, and the nerves answered it. Nothing was continuous but the roaring of the sea. Yet they were secure, so Rosamond thought, within.

"Let's tell stories," she said, dreamily. "Let's talk about—" There she paused, remembering the alien presence, and with a note of vagrant laughter tried again. "Let's tell a continued story. I'll begin. Once there was a prince. He had nice

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brown hair and a cowlick on his forehead." Whereupon she reflected that this was Kent, too definitely portrayed, and, to the confusion of accuracy, gave him blue eyes instead of brown. "He was a very remarkable prince, taller than anybody else, straighter, more wonderful every way. He was very sad and very funny, very impatient and very good-tempered— Was he good-tempered, Mrs. Markham?" She shook Helen's knee with her laughter, and Helen, constrained by her, went on.

"Yes, he was really good-tempered; for when he was upset you could always make him smile in a second. The right person could."

"I guess she can!" said Rosamond, inadvertently, and bit her lip.

Helen continued, hastily. She was afraid; yet Jane Harding sat quite still, a breathing silence.

"The prince lived in the palace for a while. Then he went out into the world,

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and the world wasn't the sort of place he hoped it was. Some of the kindest things proved to be cruel. Some of the prettiest ones had dust on them. The dust rubbed off and smirched him. There was a time when he didn't look like a prince. He was like a beggar."

"How strange you are!" Rosamond sat up and stared at her through the fire-shine. "That isn't the way you talk. What is it, Mrs. Markham?"

Jane Harding's voice broke upon the pause as Helen, starting at it, found she knew it would.

"I can play that game," said the woman, with her unmoved civility. "It's my turn now."

Helen thrust Rosamond away from her in the violence of her responsive movement; then with a quick compunction she bent and laid both hands upon the girl's shoulders, as if to guard her.

"No!" she said, commandingly. "No!"

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I'll finish. I said he looked like a beggar. Rosamond, he was a beggar. He begged for love, and what seemed love betrayed him. But he kept on seeking, and he found the one person who was to give it to him. She was the only one he wanted. For remember, Rosamond, he hadn't had any love; he had only had the things that look like it and are not, and his poor heart was all torn with shame and trouble." The current of persuasion failed her. "Rosamond," she cried, forgetting the other woman, and yet urged by her insistent presence, "don't let anything separate you from what you love. Remember, life is bigger than you think. There are sins, but they are great archangels of another sort for us to conquer. Never be separated from people, never forsake them. What is it in the Bible?—'neither death nor life . . . nor principalities nor powers—'"

Violent shuddering laid hold on her, and Rosamond sprang up.

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"Hannah!" she cried, sharply. "Hannah! Mrs. Harding, turn on the light!"

While Jane Harding was groping for the key, Hannah came swiftly with a lamp.

"The light won't work," said she. "The storm has played the mischief with it. You lamb, what is it?" She set down the lamp, and hurried over to Helen, shaking in Rosamond's arms. "She's got a chill," said Hannah. "You throw that fur thing over her, an' I'll get some whiskey." She came back instantly with a smoking tumbler, and Helen's lips bit upon it, chattering.

She smiled up into Rosamond's face.

"I'm not cold," said she. "It's only nerves."

"Nerves or not, you get straight into your bed," said Hannah. "It's as warm as toast. There's a soapstone to the foot. You help her, Rosamond. There!"

Helen had risen; again in a gust of will that seemed to fit the storm, she got her

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wavering grip on circumstance. But bed seemed to her merciful. At the door she paused.

"Good-night, Mrs. Harding," she said. "Hannah will show you to your room. She will give you some of my night things."

"I sha'n't need anything but what I have," returned Jane Harding. She was standing, in a scrupulous courtesy, yet with a rigid self-restraint that seemed a challenge. She was apparently quite uninterested in the moment, but her eyes were watchful.

"Good-night," said Helen, and went up the stairs. Jane Harding followed, and Hannah, in passing, briefly indicated her room. The guest stepped in and Helen heard the turning of the key. The sound heartened her, and in her own big chamber, where she was to be with Rosamond, she laughed from an incredulous relief.

"Rosamond!" said she. "Rosamond!"

"What, Mrs. Markham?"

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"I almost think we may get home safely, after all!"

"Get home? Of course we shall get home!" said Rosamond, wondering. "You're not timid because we're just three women here alone?"

"No, I'm not timid. It isn't the night or the place—the dear place—it's the powers of the air. Hear Hannah clanging to the doors and bolting them!"

She began undressing slowly. Her gown laid by and her hair sweeping, she stood before the fire and mused a moment, her arms stretched out before her, her hands grasping the mantel. The sight of them recalled her suddenly to John Markham, because he loved them. She flushed, and felt her happiness.

"Don't get chilled again," urged Rosamond.

"No. I wonder if that woman truly has some night things. I must see."

She caught her own night-gown from

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the bed, and crossed the closet forming a passage between the rooms. Jane Harding's door was slightly open. The woman had not heeded the dark closet; from her side it had apparently no outlet. Helen knocked softly, and then, unheard, paused in a spasm of pity for the lonely figure there. Jane Harding was sitting by a light-stand, where she had put the lamp. She, too, had taken off her dress, and her gaunt decency, in its serviceable cotton clothes, struck at Helen's heart like a new moral poverty.

"May I come in?" she called. "I've brought you—"

She was advancing, in a sweet defiance of intrusion, led, perhaps, by some desire to offer the stranger the intimacy of their common sex. She halted sharply, midway in the room. Jane Harding was busy, and immediately Helen saw what occupied her. A packet of letters lay open on her lap. She was assorting them. Three

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were on the table. A little pile was on one knee. She seemed to be selecting some for special purposes. These were Kent's letters. With the keenness of startled vision, Helen caught his hand upon the superscription. She even noted that the envelopes were numbered, as if certain ones were to be laid aside. This was a second's thought. In that second Jane Harding had heard her voice and, looking up, seen her advancing. The woman started, a clutching hand bent on gathering up the papers at a grasp. The light-stand went over. The lamp crashed down and shivered. A river of flame followed the spreading oil upon the matting, and another line of light ran up the woman's clothes. Helen fell on her knees and began twisting up Jane Harding's skirt and crushing out the fire in her hands.

The letters were everywhere, and the hurrying flame was close upon them. Jane Harding stood grasping at her burning

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skirts, wringing them as if she wrung fire out of them. Even in the heat of danger she had remembered the axioms that rule emergencies.

"My Lord!" she called out, piercingly. "Them letters are in the fire! Put your foot on that one there!" And Helen did it. "You let me be!" cried the woman. "Put it out where 'tis on the floor. Give me that pillar."

They each took a pillow and smothered the thing where it ran towards a valanced bed.

"Don't call!" whispered Helen, sharply. "Rosamond! We must save Rosamond!"

At last she and the woman had, to her mind, the common cause of sparing Rosamond. There was soothing in it. Again she felt the calm responsive to an urgent need. Her shadowy fears had fused into one dread, and she was fighting it. This was embodied terror, yet it was nothing compared with the soul-tremor she had

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felt before. And the "Fire Charm" went surging through her memory.

Jane Harding had not ceased beating at the thing where it ran about the floor, and Helen alternately fought it there, and then turned back to strip charred shreds and tatters from the woman's clothing. The burning river reached the bed and touched it. Helen stooped to it; her own skirt caught, and the flames had her.

"Don't call!" she whispered, with the "Fire Charm" deafening in her ears. "Don't call Rosamond!"

In a flash of pain her senses sickened. Suddenly she was in a world where heat and light were one enemy, and the thick air choked her. Sensation was an anguish. In the revolt of her tortured body she even forgot Rosamond. And the "Fire Charm" rippled into sleep.

V

WHEN Hannah came in with a lamp to offer the guest some possible service, Helen lay on one of the two little beds, and Jane Harding was holding her down, with blankets over her. The woman shuddered from head to foot. In a mechanical zeal she drew the blankets tighter.

"I guess I've killed her," she said, conversationally.

Then Rosamond, curious over Helen's delay, came idling in. She gave a cry, and ran to the bedside. Jane Harding was turning slowly about, demanding of Hannah, who did not notice her:

"You see if I'm afire anywheres."

Hannah cast a comprehensive look at

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the charred room, and set down her lamp. Her face was gray under its seatan.

"She has burned to death!" called Rosamond, piercingly. "She is dead."

"You go to the head o' the sullar stairs," said Hannah to Jane Harding. "Get that can of olive-oil."

Jane Harding turned and took two steps. Her face writhed, and she stumbled. Rosamond cried out again:

"Her feet! Her feet! Don't you see? She is burned, too. Where is it? Let me go." As she spoke she ran, and in a moment she was back again.

Jane Harding crawled into the nearest chair and set her teeth upon her pain. Hannah and Rosamond worked together over Helen, with delicate touches agonizing to their own sick apprehension. When they had finished they turned to Mrs. Harding. She met their glance.

"No," she said, stolidly. "I'll do up

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my own feet. I've got to wait a spell. You let me be."

Hannah took no notice; she knelt and began her ministration, and the woman yielded to her. Once she moaned when a hurt touched her too nearly, and at that, or summoned by the pain that had engulfed her, Helen's eyes came open. She tried to grasp at Rosamond's dress, but both her hands were bandaged and their use failed her. Her eyes besought the girl.

"Rosamond," she whispered, "promise me."

Rosamond bent to her.

"Promise not to leave me. Stay here by me. Look at me. Don't look at anything else." Her own inward vision was on the letters as she had seen them last.

"Yes, yes," said Rosamond. "I promise."

"But perhaps they were burned up," wandered Helen. "Rosamond, were they burned?"

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"What, dearest—what?"

"Never mind, child; never mind. Stay here by me."

"I'm going to undress you," said Hannah to Jane Harding, "an' git you into the bed in t'other room. I can carry ye."

"No, no!" cried Helen. "Not in there! She must not leave this room."

"I shall set here," said Jane Harding, immovably; but Hannah fell upon her and stripped her clothes away from her. She was the stronger. She dropped Helen's night-gown over the woman's shoulders, and then raised her and laid her in the other bed. Helen was holding Rosamond's gaze with her constraining eyes.

"Promise!" she whispered.

Rosamond put her lips to Helen's cheek.

"Promise you won't go over there to her, nor listen to what she tells you. Promise, Rosamond!"

"I promise," said the girl again. To

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her terrified sense this was only a sad part of pain's delirium.

"You pick up them letters," said Jane Harding to Hannah, busy with the broken glass.

Rosamond sprang to help, but Helen's cry arrested her:

"Rosamond, stay here with me!"

Then Hannah gathered up the letters, and Jane Harding, rising on her elbow, watched, to keep the tally of them.

"Tie 'em," the woman commanded. "There's my hair-string on the bureau. Now you put 'em under my pillow."

Hannah slipped the letters under the pillow, and the woman lay back and closed her eyes. When Hannah left the room for a moment, Rosamond followed and stayed her in the hall. The girl had the distended eyes of fear.

"She will die!" she shuddered. "She will die! Hannah, we are all alone here, and we can't save her."

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"We've saved her so fur," said Hannah, grimly. "When it's daylight I'll git that woman-doctor over beyond."

"You can't cross the cassy."

Hannah left the words unanswered, and went about her business swiftly. Rosamond stole in and sat down by Helen's bed. The room had suddenly a most solemn look. There were the two white beds, and the two bodies on them, in unnatural outline. Once or twice Helen moaned a little, and then caught herself to silence; but Jane Harding lay quite still. Even the sound of her breathing had been subdued to an uncanny blank. Then Hannah came back, and all night she went to and fro in a merciful tendance which seemed to do no good. Helen, as the hours wore on, drifted into a state that, to the outward eye, was a delirium. To her, conscious of herself, it was an exaltation over pain. Her bodily hurts stung her like an ever-present fire, but some part of her

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seemed to rise and float suspended in the upper air, conscious of the pangs of earth and yet victorious over them. The fire enwrapped her like a mantle, but the "Fire Charm" sang in her ears, translating pain into pain's angel. It told her why the thing had happened. Like an echo of Elizabeth's prophecy, it came upon her that she was suffering this for John Markham's sake, and immediately it was good to her. He had done the deeds which his bodily eyes urged him to accomplish for the benefit of the earthly polity, and she in the body expiated them. He had ignored the great counsellors that stand above sense to bend the mortal life to other uses, and she was the vicarious sacrifice, to balance all the pain attendant on his word. The body did not seem to her so unimportant as it had sometimes. It was the creature standing in the breach and allowed, most mercifully, to do the will of souls. She had but two wishes now: to save her

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husband and to save Rosamond, and pain seemed to be the road by which she travelled. The girl sat beside her, a figure in pathetic readiness, like one who stills her breath in loving dread.

"Rosamond!" whispered Helen, from an ebbing wave of anguish.

The girl bent swiftly over her. "Drink this, dear!" she implored. "Drink this!"

"No. Rosamond, I may not live."

"Yes," said the girl, steadfastly; "you will live." But her own heart constricted in sad confirmation.

"It may not be best. We must wish for what is best. But I must not leave things half done. Rosamond, Kent is coming." The words failed her, and her mind floated. That still figure in the other bed seemed, to her exalted fancy, to rise, standing between hope and her. She clung to her purpose, and came back. "The powers of heaven are stronger than the powers of hell," she murmured. "Rosa-

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mond, we must face sin—our own sin, the sin of other people. We must not let it conquer us.”

“No,” said the girl, with the same quietude, risen to combat pain’s delirium. “No.”

“Bend lower,” said Helen. “Listen.” Helen thought the figure in the other bed was rising on its elbow, to listen also, and her whisper was almost inaudible. “You will forgive him anything?”

“Yes,” said the girl; “yes!” not knowing what she promised. “But there is nothing to forgive.”

“We must be merciful,” said Helen. “Remember that. We must be merciful.”

There was a movement from the other bed, and Rosamond rose instinctively to answer it. But Helen, seeing her, cried out:

“No, no! Stay here by me!”

Then Hannah came and gave Jane Harding water; and Rosamond stayed.

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When the morning broke, the storm was over, the spring sun riding in a windy sky. The world glittered; the only sign of what had gone was the crying of the sea. The light struck too opulently into white faces, and Rosamond, with the signs of last night's terror still about her, sat by Helen's bedside and served her when she might. Hannah, without, called her, and she obeyed, to find the woman blown from the wind, with wet wisps of hair across her face, hurrying into dry clothes.

"I've got the woman-doctor," said Hannah. "They'll bring her 'round t'other side in a bo't. An' I've had 'em telephone Elizabeth."

"How did you cross the cassy?"

"I don't know. Now I'll feed the critters."

The woman-doctor came. She was young, with the gray hair of overwork—calm in the possession of new knowledge and reverent of the old earth legends her

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country birth had taught her. To Helen this was another ministering spirit which could do no good. Yet, as her floating mind assured her, when she could arrest it for a moment in its strange vibrations, nothing mattered while Jane Harding lay, a silent outline, staring at the wall.

With the next train came down Elizabeth. Rosamond looked up at her, with a quiver on her face, and then, surrendering her post, crept out of the room.

"She must go back to town," said Helen, instantly. "Bess, stoop down here. Send her back."

"Yes, she shall go," said Bess. "I'll tell her so. I'm going to do a lot of things. It isn't wise for you and Mrs. Harding to be here together." How they had come together she did not know. Hannah, downstairs, had told her the woman's name. "I can roll your bed through the doorway—"

"No, no!" The red came into Helen's

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face. Her eyes were instantly distraught. "Bess, you must mind me. You must listen. If she is here, I can keep watch of her. If you take her somewhere else, she will see Rosamond."

"I won't allow it. Rosamond shall be sent home."

Helen's voice sank to a lower whisper. "She would follow. She would get up and walk on those burned feet, but what she'd follow. Do nothing, nothing, Bess, till Kent is here."

"Helen, we must have a nurse. We must have a doctor down from town."

Helen moved under her coverings. She seemed to be struggling to loose herself. Fear was in her face and a despairing strength.

"I cannot, Bess," she said. "I cannot. They would make me do things. They would not understand when I said she must be here. Why, you trust Doctor Susan! We've always trusted her. And

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you must take care of us, you and Hannah, just till Kent comes home."

Fear got hold of Elizabeth also, but only for Helen in her fevered state.

"Be quiet, dear," she begged her. "Yes, till Kent comes home."

As soon as possible, she slipped downstairs to Rosamond. The girl stood by the fire, in a wan seclusion, thinking.

"I've telegraphed my father," said Elizabeth.

"She will not live," responded Rosamond, her lips shuddering upon the words.

"I don't know. But she sha'n't be terrified to death. Rosamond, we've got to face the music."

Rosamond made no answer. Beside Elizabeth, hot with determination, reddened from the air, she was the ghostly image of a girl.

"We can't refuse to face things," said Elizabeth, whipping up her courage in a despairing burst. "Rosamond"— and

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then she knew she could not tell her, and ended, weakly — “she wants you to go back to town.”

“I sha’n’t go back.” Rosamond had seated herself and was brooding over the fire. “I shall telegraph mamma. Do you think I could leave Helen Markham lying there like that? No, I shall not go back.”

“It will trouble Helen.”

“Very well, then; she needn’t see me. I’ll stay down here. But I sha’n’t go back to town.”

“Rosamond,” essayed Elizabeth again, “if any one should give you evidence—papers—that were damaging to Kent, what would you do with them?”

The girl turned upon her in a rush of feeling that brought back her color.

“Damaging to Kent?”, she repeated. “To Kent?”

“Yes. Proof that he had done a great wrong. Long ago, Rosamond, long ago!

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If the papers were laid in your hand, what would you do with them?"

The girl stood looking at her, pale now, and fiery-eyed. Her nostrils trembled.

"I don't know," she said. "One of two things. I should throw them into the fire or give them to Kent. Where are those papers?" But before Elizabeth could answer she went on in a proud haste. "Whatever they say, they prove nothing—nothing to me, Bess. There is something wrong. I have known it since yesterday. Your mother knows it. But I refuse it. If he wished to tell me himself, I should refuse it. That's all. Not a word about Kent—not a word!"

Elizabeth walked away to the window and looked dimly at the glittering day. She came back and held out her strong hand.

"You are as gallant as Helen Markham," she muttered. "I can't say more than that."

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Rosamond was trembling, but she gave her hand.

"Suppose I told you myself, Rosamond?"

"I should refuse to listen."

The hand-clasp broke because they were too moved to keep it.

"As to what you call evidence," said Rosamond, "if it can be used against him, he and I must face that together. But don't act as if I were the world outside of him. Bess, I am—I shall be—" She paused upon the words and could not form them; but Elizabeth knew, and silently said them for her in an equal reverence.

Rosamond would not go home. She telegraphed for news of her mother, and, having had a reassuring answer, took up her post outside the sick-room door, to be sent on errands. Helen asked for her, and, when she was told the girl would not come in, was comforted. Yet not altogether; for now she was losing sway over her sick

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mind, and she saw the wraith of Rosamond at her bedside. And always when the girl appeared a voice seemed to salute her—Jane Harding calling, grimly, “I want my just dues.”

At the end of the third day, a soft spring night with a moist wind blowing, Elizabeth was alone down-stairs by the fire, her tired body gratefully relaxed. She was not needed for the moment; her watch came later. There was a sound of wheels and then a step she knew. The front door opened and a man walked in upon her: John Markham, jaded, worn by haste, after his journey from the West. Elizabeth rose, and the unwilling pride she had in him sprang up, and with quick blood brought some confidence to life in her. Their likeness and unlikeness always strove together in her thought of him, and, while she raged against him, she adored him. He was of the heroic mould, his head and profile of the statesman type.

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His eyes were deep, lighted by a glance that probed and sometimes slew. One person it caressed. His mouth was dauntless and his chin obstinate. As he stood before her he seemed to pale and weaken. Dread ran over him in a shiver.

"How is it, Bess?" he asked. His voice was unfamiliar to her with its touch of tears.

"She is—"

"Is she alive, Bess?"

"Yes, father, she is alive. Sit down."

His body swayed a little under the wave of hope.

"I must go to her." He was pulling off his coat mechanically, and she helped him.

"You can't for a little." She spoke the more gently as his fear became apparent. "The doctor is there. She and Hannah are attending to her wounds."

He winced. "It got into the papers," he said, in a voice unlike John Markham's.

JUDGMENT

"Only it said you were both burned. I read it on the train."

"I know. That came from Hannah's telephoning me at the settlement. A newspaper woman happened to be there yesterday—"

He interrupted her. "Where is she hurt? How much?"

"You must have something to eat, father."

"No, no! How much is she burned?"

"A good deal on her body, her arms, her hands. It didn't touch her face."

"Her hands!" he groaned.

"But that isn't the worst of it. She got a chill that day. Now it may be pneumonia."

Long as Elizabeth had studied her father she did not know him. Because he dealt hard blows, she thought he had the fibre to withstand them. Therefore, innocently, she became his judgment. Old John Markham had not forborne to strike,

JUDGMENT

and even his daughter need not spare him. She had returned, with him, to the Hebraic law.

"How did she get a chill?" he asked, with knitted brows. "Why is she down here?"

"You know almost as much as I do. Helen wrote you about the woman that threatened Kent—"

His frown deepened. This was the judicial look he kept to bend upon a slipshod world.

"It is somehow connected with that," Elizabeth went on. "Rosamond March and Jane Harding came down here together. Helen followed them, and since the fire she won't let the woman leave her sight. She is afraid to trust her. The woman's feet are burned; but that makes no difference. She doesn't seem to be Jane Harding now, to Helen. She is a spirit, a sort of devil. There they lie in the east chamber. The woman never speaks. She is terrifying Helen to death.

JUDGMENT

Yet if we separate them, it will frighten her the more. It will be a shock she can't recover from."

"I must go up." He was out of his chair, and Elizabeth rose and put a hand upon his arm.

"You can't go up. Not yet. Wait till the doctor's through."

He sat down again and watched the stairs.

"The woman must be moved into another room," said he. "That's the first thing."

"Father, you can't do that. It's a foolish situation, but it's real." She was standing over him as strong as he, instinct with his own spirit. "Father, look here! Do you think I'm a womanish creature given to theories, hysterics?"

He glanced at her absently. His mind was all with Helen; but the girl's determination compelled him, and he answered, "No."

JUDGMENT

"Then you'd better heed me when I tell you to deal with this gently or you'll murder Helen. You'll sacrifice her, as you always have done."

"Sacrifice Helen!" The man awoke, shocked from his intrenched security. In his silent heart, Helen, he knew, was the one creature who had from him continued worship, unfailing tenderness.

"Don't you know you have sacrificed Helen? She has been the bleeding victim you've kept nailed to crosses all your life."

Her blood was hot against him. In their old estrangement she had been, after the first, as silent to him as he had been to her, their warfare incrusting under the cold habit of like natures; but now, in her championship of the woman whom she loved, in her own way, as broodingly as he did, she began as if she were reading from the book of the law. This was the law as she translated it.



“‘YOU ARE A HARD MAN, JOHN MARKHAM’”

JUDGMENT

"I can't have you go down to your grave blind and deaf, as you've been living. You are a hard man. They told you so last week in Cincinnati, when you went there to meet the delegates of the union. One of them said you were just, and that old man, the one that lost his place for disrespect, what did he say? He told the truth, because you forced him to it. 'You are a hard man, John Markham.' He dared to say it. It was true. You are a hard man."

John Markham sat staring at the fire. Silence was the habit of his life, save when the moment came to smite. But, thinking of the strike, new weariness crept upon his face. Those weeks of warfare in the West had taken something out of him. The things men had said to him had scored him deep. He had bled when they had taken his honesty and twisted it, he felt, into another guise.

"You have been hard to people always,

JUDGMENT

in the world and here at home. You were like iron to Kent. No wonder he went to the devil. He'd have stayed there longer but for Helen. That sweet soul wouldn't let him. There she was praying for him to come back, and there were you letting him crawl back by himself. You were inhuman to the Landors. To me—we won't talk about that. And every time Helen, with that divine instinct of hers, knew you were belaboring backs, and she crept between and took the blows herself. Powers of heaven and earth! Sometimes I wake at night and see that woman bleeding from the hurts you deal her when you think you're doing God service."

John Markham had not moved. His face was fixed not so much in pain as in the mask of a man who has it to conceal. Never had his daughter so resembled him. The frenzy of tongues had come upon her, and stirred her as he sometimes was moved, to break habitual calm and hurl

JUDGMENT

straight talk he meant to back by deeds. Her moment had come and she was using it, yet with no thought of personal vengeance. She was defending Helen, and, through Helen, the man who loved her—John Markham in his chosen shell. She dared not trust him through these doubtful issues, unless he should be armed with mercy.

“Somebody has got to snatch you back from making more mistakes. You mean to be just, and you are cruel. Look at this case of Kent. You refused it. ‘He must take the consequences of his own acts.’ You said that. Then you stood aside.”

“It was simply blackmail.”

“It was, and it should have been dealt with by a man who knows the world—not by Helen. She has only one court of appeal—the will of God. I like to see the will of God work through a court of law. Think how futile the whole thing has been,

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a plot out of a play. A woman slanders Kent. Helen—and I, too, because I'm nothing but a woman—believe the slander. Life isn't melodrama. Why didn't you grapple with the thing, and turn it inside out, and worry it with your teeth, and toss it into the gutter? Where was your justice then?"

"The story was quite true. I knew it years ago. Kent told me."

Her young radiance faded and the hope in her died down.

"Why did he tell you?" she demanded.

"It was when Helen was sick and wanted him to come home. He wouldn't enter my house unless I knew." There was pride in his voice over his son's despairing honesty. Elizabeth detected it there, and, in her fierce way, loved them both.

"You let him come!" she said, rejoicingly.

"I looked into the case myself," he said,

JUDGMENT

repudiating praise. "I found he was supporting the woman in her last illness. He was working hard."

"Was that when he drove the express wagon and let us think he was insane to do it?"

"Yes."

"And now, after you had watched him through that fight, you stand aside to let Rosamond—the girl he loves—get the rest of his punishment! Well, Helen wouldn't stand aside. She can't. If anything is wounded, there she is with salves and bandages. She goes round doing her divine, futile things when you might prevent the hurts she tries to heal. And then she pays—she pays, John Markham."

Unconsciously she used the name she saw in the newspapers and heard from the mouths of men when they held him up to praise and blame. "And after all," she said—"after all your deifying of justice, you know nothing whatever about it. You

JUDGMENT

think it is a chariot rolling on and on; it's a kind of pendulum that swings back and forth and hits and hurts. It has done that lots of times; but every time it strikes Helen, because she stands in the breach."

His eyes were on the stairs, watching for the signal; but he listened. She got up and walked the floor.

"I don't know why I feel such championship of Helen. Yes, I do. Because she won't let anybody but the powers of heaven champion her, and they don't seem to do it. Justice! Yes, you've got it. I never saw anything like the exquisite cleverness of it. A delicate, spiritual judgment you wouldn't have seen, you wouldn't have felt. Those revenges have been coming for years, but you never knew them. It takes a crude, big force like this to assault you. Fire, wounds, pain; here they are, and they've attacked Helen."

John Markham sat absolutely still. He

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scarcely breathed; to Elizabeth, caught up in the chariot of revolt, he hardly seemed to hear; and so in her rage she gave her coursers rein, speaking to herself rather than to him. He roused himself and startled her.

"Bess," he said, "you talk about Kent and the Landors. Your name came in there. When have I injured you?" For John Markham to own that he had wronged any one was strange. But nothing seemed unusual to the girl in this moment of sorrow's exaltation, with Helen prone up-stairs, slain in a futile battle. She answered, simply:

"It doesn't matter."

"I don't know, Bess. I don't know."

She flashed at him: "You must have known. Because I didn't talk about it, do you think I didn't see? It isn't my way to talk, except once in a thousand years. This is one of the times. I've been pretty still till now."

JUDGMENT

There was the closing of a door above, and again he watched the stairs. No one came.

"What have I done?" he asked, in a direct simplicity.

"You did nothing to me personally. The blow hit me because it fell on people that were mine. You ruined the Landors. You hurt me through Graham Landor, as Helen would be hurt if a man ruined you."

He made a gesture of the hand.

"Yes, I know," she said, bitterly. "You mean they deserved to be ruined. They did—Graham's father did. But even old Tom Landor could have been treated like a human being. You did it like a god—a god demanding sacrifice. You smote them hip and thigh, and when they went down you turned your attention to some other part of the battle-field and looked for more to smite. It isn't your acts I complain of, father; it's your spirit. You think you wield the sword of God. Perhaps you do,

JUDGMENT

but you're a wasteful swordsman. You cut off more than one head at a blow."

"Graham Landor!" he repeated. The words had a wondering sound. He had weighed the young man, and found him by tradition and heredity unsuited to the market - place. Here in his house was Graham Landor, quite another person: a human thing for whom another creature had been agonizing.

"Why do you act as if you didn't know?" she cried, beyond herself. "You knew it at the time. We had some talks together. Do you remember how Helen used to look when you and I came away from our duels in the library, two Mark-hams pitted in open field, one as bad as the other? I do. I remember it."

"I knew"—his words labored, but he went on evenly—"I knew you blamed me about Landor. But that was at first. I thought you accepted my estimate of the case. I thought what you felt was nat-

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ural—quite natural; it was the revolt of youth.”

“Do you think I should ever have given up Graham Landor if he hadn’t given up me? You struck at his pride, and he forsook us all. Why, you thought Graham Landor wasn’t fit to enter your house! I have sometimes thought he didn’t consider a woman of your blood fit to marry. If he had—if he had come to me—” She stopped, and her face flamed in the completed answer. “Why did you think I left your house, father?” she added, in a cumulative passion. “Why?”

“You were very wilful,” he began, as if it were a simple statement he had long ago accepted.

“I was wilful; but I left it for two reasons. One was that we were killing Helen, you and I, with that warfare between us. The other was that if Graham Landor wasn’t fit to eat your bread, I wouldn’t eat it. That awful partisanship of women

JUDGMENT

had come up in me—the kind that makes Helen feel she can twist the laws of the universe and weave them into a coat of mail for you. There are some things you don't know, John Markham, about the way women care for men. Learn them. They'll make you humble."

He was humble then, not before her, but in the face of unknown things. He got up from his chair and stood, bent a little, an older man.

"Bess," he said. Then he stopped. All the sickness of his heart rose in the cry: "I must go up there." In his trouble the universe seemed to have forsaken him. Some uncomprehended law he had innocently awakened had spread a pall between him and the soul in whom he had his refuge. He was an inarticulate creature. Not even to himself could he translate the bond between him and the woman upstairs; but she was the intimate substance of him, the sanctuary where he withdrew,

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the one still spot in the fluent scheme of things. She seemed to be ebbing away from him, drawn by forces over which he had no power, and this young voice was showing him how he had ignorantly evoked the forces where they slept. The room was dark before him. Familiar outlines swam in it. The world he had always dominated refused his tyranny. Elizabeth, recalled to the sight of him, returned quickly to her normal self.

"You can go up," she said. "The doctor is in the back hall talking with Hannah. I hear them. Go up, father. Or shall I go and prepare Helen?"

He shook his head. Helen had no need to be prepared. They both knew that. He was immediate to her needs, like air and sun. Elizabeth watched him walking heavily from the room, and it came upon her that, if Helen died, he would be broken by his grief. The greater powers of life would be upon him at a bound. The spir-

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itual universe of which he took no account, save in the abstract honesties that govern life, would crush him. It would be a collision of two worlds, and John Markham, the speck clinging to habitable fact, would be ground to atoms. A woman's answering pity woke in her.

"Father," she cried, "I'm sorry!"

He looked back at her and smiled a little, to reassure her. His face grew sweet, as it did for Helen under the softening of great love.

"Never mind, Bess," he said, in the tone she fancied she had heard him use when she was little. "Never mind."

Then he began to climb the stairs.

Elizabeth went back and stood there by the fire. She was a woman of sturdy strength, but she was trembling. Remorse had hold of her, and at one leap her mind reversed its warfare to crush her in an equal blame. She smiled with a humorous scorn of herself and her own

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action. This was life's irony, as she had mixed the cup. Here was old John Markham wounded in the moment of his grief because he had tried unjustly to serve judgment; and it was John Markham's daughter who had smitten him, from the very rage for justice he had bequeathed her. Only in her it was different: justice mingled with some other quality of equal potency. This was the hot impulse which had caused her own mother to storm against him and urge him, unwittingly, to a more rigorous will. It came upon her with a sudden awe over the uncomprehended ways of life that Helen had been, after all, the only one to understand him wholly. She had believed against belief. She had stood aside, not questioning him, but setting the power of her spirit against the hurtling of his deeds.

Elizabeth, pacing back and forth, called upon her own soul to come forth for judgment. In the process of enlightening

JUDGMENT

him she had illuminated herself. She had judged, justly perhaps, but too passionately; like him, she had acted upon the fruits of her own judgment, and, like him, she had not remembered mercy. The one desire she had in mind, that of preparing him to see Helen without destroying the delicate balance of life-forces by some crude denial—that, possibly, she had accomplished. But what she had indubitably done was to inflict on him a lifelong hurt. If Helen were to die, he would bear a double agony in the memory of words that could not be unsaid.

Tears sprang hotly to her eyes. Woman's pity rose in her, bidding her spare and not to smite. She walked the floor swiftly in new longing to wipe away pain, however justly suffered, to bring sleep to all eyes and softness to the pillowed head. Again there was a step on the veranda and some one at the door. She brushed her tears away and went hurriedly to fore-

JUDGMENT

stall the knocker's clang. Opening the door, sweet spring air blew in on her, as if in prophecy. And at the instant all omens were fulfilled: there stood Graham Landor.

VI

NEITHER of them spoke in that first instant, and Elizabeth, without a welcoming gesture, stood with her hand upon the door.

"Well, Bess," said Landor, finally, "don't you think I might come in?"

Recalled to ordinary courtesies, she stepped aside, and he followed her into the hall. There he stood, hat in hand, regarding her. After the silence of their separation, no speech was ready. Graham began:

"How do I look, Bess?"

"You look—just the same." Her low voice trembled and made the words less cool. If her heart had been allowed to answer, it would have told him he looked

JUDGMENT

older, more worn, but dearer—a thousand times the man he promised to be, even in those beloved days.

“No, no! I mean now, after this trip down from town. Do I strike you as a chap that’s been through something?”

“You look tired.”

“I ought to look blasted to the bone. For I’ve had a shock. I saw Mrs. Markham had been in an accident here, and you, Bess, too. Then I seized my hat and ran for the train, and you meet me at the door. Do you call that a shock, Bess Markham? Do you?”

“Helen is hurt. She is very ill—”

Her voice failed her because she was at once aware that there were tears in his eyes, and that he was laboring under the feeling he seemed to flout. She understood suddenly that not even Helen Markham’s hurt had called him down here. It was she. Landor was pulling off his coat with an absorbed quietude, at the same

JUDGMENT

time getting his emotions under sway. He rubbed his hands and held them to the blaze, though the night was a warm one and the hall fire had been lighted chiefly for its company.

"Come into the library," said Elizabeth. "Father is up-stairs."

"You sent for him? What about the strike?"

"I haven't asked him."

There was a knock at the outer door, and Landor opened it. It was a messenger from the village with a telegram for John Markham.

"They've begun to come," said Elizabeth, laying it on the table while Landor signed for her. "They follow father round in flocks. Come into the library."

It was at once quite natural to be sitting in a room with him, talking in the habit of civilized intercourse; yet for years her heart had cried for him, like one of the delights of life withheld for reasons.

JUDGMENT

"I want to know about Mrs. Markham—" he began.

She had not the heart to tell that story, and gave him the bare truth of it, touching lightly on details. One fact only mattered—Helen was very ill.

"We must send for a nurse," she added.

"Why didn't you do it at once?"

"I can't tell you now. Helen had fancies."

Then they were silent, and suddenly Landor laughed a little.

"What is it?" asked Elizabeth.

"I'm thinking how queer it is, how the barriers of life break down. I should have said I wouldn't enter your father's house, nor eat at his table; and I've invaded two of his houses within a fortnight, and one of those times I broke bread with his wife. And now I'm going to make love to his daughter."

"Graham!" She started up, and the familiar name came sharply.



"THEN THEY WERE SILENT"

JUDGMENT

Landor shook his head musingly and would not look at her. At the moment he could not. He had endured too much on the journey down. Elizabeth Markham, he thought, had been hurt, and he should reach her in the midst of tragic suffering; but seeing her strong and fair, in untouched sanity, he found the reaction hard to meet.

"You see, Bess," he said, reflectively, "I've been a fool. I cut your father because he blackened mine. I suppose I've been suffering a fever of shame all these years at having my rascally blood analyzed and named. So I wouldn't come near you. And the minute a lying newspaper tells me Bess Markham's hurt, I see that nothing under the sun but Bess Markham has much bigness to it. Look at me, Bess—look at me!"

She did look at him, paling under the challenge, her spirit meeting his. Graham Landor here in the flesh, laying bonds

JUDGMENT

upon her, was a different matter from the man haunting her woman's dreams. The wholesome strength in her defied and beckoned him. She forgot Helen, as he, in his absorption, had ignored her.

"You see," said Landor, his thought laboring within him, "we've got to make it go somehow."

"What?"

"I am frightfully poor, dear. I make money, but I have to pay it all away. That you wouldn't mind. If I could coax you to come with me, you'd live meagrely for the sake of me, wouldn't you, Bess?"

She did not answer, but, smiling tenderly, she smoothed her gown where it fell in stiff folds suited to its serviceable weave. She was bringing testimony from her own plain living at the settlement to show him luxury had long been over for her.

"I suppose I've been eaten up by pride," said Landor, wonderingly. "It's the re-

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action from my father's downfall. And I've lost years of you. That's a judgment on me for my pride. It's a mercy you didn't go and marry some other fellow that prized you more than trumpery name and reputation. You'll have to carry my name, Bess. Your father won't approve. But you've got to, haven't you?"

Involuntarily she rose, and he stood also. They faced each other in a challenge more significant than soft acknowledgments. Landor had kept his purpose behind its mask of light interpretation; but now it shook him, and he looked his love.

"Bess," said he, "you do like me. Don't you like me?"

"Yes," she answered, in a low tone, "I like you."

"I couldn't help believing it. I knew that years ago. If I'd kept myself in your mind, maybe by now you would have loved me. But give me a chance,

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dear. Let me take back tracks and try again."

Quick avowals were at her lips, ready to meet him with an equal honesty; but she heard John Markham coming down the stairs.

"My father!" she said, and Landor straightened and drew his brows together. It was difficult to modify his habit of regarding himself as a man Markham might endorse on business grounds, but not good enough to court his daughter. But as he saw at once, with a surprise beguiling him to sympathetic interest, John Markham was altered. The haggard face drooped heavily, and he walked like a man uncertain of his way. Elizabeth was at his side in quick solicitude.

"Have you seen her, father?"

He shook his head. Then the words interpreted his dull look.

"I have been sitting by her. She does not know me."

JUDGMENT

"You have a telegram," she said, and brought it to him.

He opened it indifferently, and then laid it by. He had apparently not noticed Landor, and the other man stood waiting, in a grave concern. He was sharing, through memory and anticipation, the trouble of the house. His own claims were in abeyance. Now, Markham became aware of him. He looked at him for an instant, through his mists of trouble, and then as keenly at Elizabeth. He took a step towards Landor, and held out his hand. Graham started, as he gave his own. His forehead crimsoned. In some uncomprehended way it seemed as if John Markham had accepted him.

"If another message comes," said Markham to Elizabeth, "keep the boy. There will be an answer." He went out of the room, and they heard his hopeless step climbing the stairs.

JUDGMENT

Outside Helen's door Hannah met him, in a pitiful encouragement.

"She'll know ye now. You go right in. She seems to be herself."

He stole softly in, but Helen heard him. Her eyes were startling in the pallor of her face. They held a rapture beyond any even he had wakened there.

"Oh," she breathed, "you came home!"

He bent to kiss her, and then it swept upon him, in a melting pity, that she could not move to meet him. She interpreted his thought.

"My hands are burned, dear," she whispered. "Shall you care?"

Tears were on his cheeks.

"I care because you have been hurt."

"But not because they won't be pretty any more! I knew it. Besides—I am not going to live. Dear, don't look like that. I've got to pay the price."

In her light-headed grasp at reason, he seemed to be himself, and yet also a creat-

JUDGMENT

ure of her dreams. Tangible enough to comfort her, he was really spirit, a being to whom, in the acute mental life she felt, she might speak without disguise. It was even unnecessary to spare him hurt, as if they were still subject to the incidents of flesh. In her stress of mind, Jane Harding dwindled and was lost. Terror lest the silent creature at her side should hear her merged into the necessity to speak and let the outcome justify itself.

Meantime, Jane Harding lay there as she had through interminable hours. She had accepted food from Hannah because she must; but she had not spoken.

"I have had dreams," said Helen. "They were about life and death. I see I must die. There has been so much wrong done, dear! But if one of us dies, it will make atonement. Now, listen. If I die, you will do anything I ask."

He bent his head upon her pillow, and his cheek wet hers.

JUDGMENT

"Live, Helen!" he besought her—"live! I will do everything if you will live."

"There are a great many things. You must listen. There is that woman—Jane Harding."

In his absorption he had taken the woman for granted, like a crude fact in the room's furnishing; but Helen turned her head slightly, and his eyes followed hers. The head upon the other pillow stirred. Jane Harding, too, was listening.

"I understand her now," said Helen. "She has done wrong, but it is because life has starved her out. She wants life, dear. You must send her to Brazil."

This was nothing but delirium to him, and he soothed her with a gentle acquiescence; but Jane Harding's head moved upon its pillow.

"I have talked to Graham Landor," said Helen. "He will tell you. But you must be the one, dear. You must do it all. Our debts to human creatures, they

JUDGMENT

must all be paid; and paid in kindness, dear, in love—nobody must call to us again without our answering."

"You must not talk," he said, in the commonplace of the sick-room. But she seemed neither wilful nor excited—only most urgently resolved.

"I must talk," she answered. "There may not be much time. Graham Landor, too, dear. He is in love with Bess. They must marry. They might be as happy as we have been. You must stand by them. Rosamond—" She turned again, in brief uneasiness, her glance upon the other bed, and for the moment her voice lowered. "I am afraid I can't save Rosamond. I don't know how. Only protect her from Jane Harding until Kent comes home. Then she must meet it, with him to help her. But stand by them, dear. Promise you'll stand by."

He promised, his lips upon her bandaged wrist. Her trouble seemed at once

JUDGMENT

to clear away. She smiled at him, offering him the worship of her eyes.

"Now I can be glad you've come," she said. "I've learned so many things out of all this. One is about pain. It is one of the ways of life. We must bless it, and not shrink from it. But we must save other people. We must make the mistakes that come from love—not that other kind." She stopped to smile at him with a radiance beyond any he had ever seen in her. "This is my will," she said, with a little laugh. "I am leaving love to all the world. You will administer it for me. You will divide my goods; that was all I had—love. But it's enough."

Then she wandered off into happy fantasy, and Hannah touched him on the sleeve.

"It's a telegram," she whispered, when he had followed her outside. "The boy is waiting."

Elizabeth, at the foot of the stairs,

JUDGMENT

stood holding his message, and he read it as he had the other one, and crumpled it in his hand. He halted there a moment, beating his fingers on the balustrade, and presently, recalling himself with a breath, he walked into the library, where Landor waited. John Markham went up to him as if he, being a man, stood for the world's tribunal. In that last hour Markham had lived out his middle life and stumbled upon age. He looked as if all the wholesome usages of being were alien to him, even food and sleep.

"They are wiring their conditions," he said, abruptly.

"The strikers?"

"Yes. They have withdrawn two points out of three. If I hold on, they will withdraw them all."

Elizabeth had come near, her eyes lighted, her cheeks aflame.

"The conditions are just, father," she said. "You know it."

JUDGMENT

"They are all just," said John Markham, stolidly. "But they can't force me."

"It isn't they that force you—" she began, but his face cut short the words. He had lifted it in terrible questioning to the unseen powers above. The hand that had created, and now held him, was omnipotent. He was an atom; he must find his place.

"No," he said, "they are not forcing me. It is something else."

He took a pencil from his pocket and wrote a message. "Call the boy," he bade Elizabeth, and gave it to her. He turned to Landor. "The strike is off," he said. "Wire it for your morning's issue."

The spirit of the market-place came upon Landor, and he set down his message. When the boy had gone, Markham, brooding by the fire, looked indifferently into the two moved young faces. He smiled, yet without hope.

JUDGMENT

"It was too late, wasn't it?" he said to Elizabeth.

"What is too late, father?" she asked him, gently.

He did not answer, but his thought had been that he was behindhand with his sacrifice. Now at last the Hebrew God was angry, and do what he might he could not buy off Helen.

Landor was speaking to him.

"I intended to cross to Footbridge and take the midnight train; but perhaps you'll let me stay and sit about till morning. You may need things done."

Elizabeth's face brightened, and John Markham answered, neutrally, "It's all one to me. Bess can decide."

Elizabeth went up-stairs to begin her watch, and the two men were left alone. They sat on either side of the cold hearth, and Landor, with a thought of Markham's comfort, lighted a match and laid it to the wood.

JUDGMENT

"May I?" he asked, and Markham nodded.

Then they stretched their feet out to the blaze and mused, each on his own road.

"Things come too late," Markham said, abruptly.

"Not everything," answered the other man, in sudden thought of Bess.

"They come too late." Markham roused himself. He wished to make his sacrifice in haste, even though it could not avail. "There is something about this woman," he added—"sending her to Brazil."

"Yes, Mrs. Markham spoke to me. She was very keen about it; she almost infected me. But it's a good deal to risk."

"I risk it," said Markham. "Give her money. Let her see the world. Pension her for life. If that is what God wants, let God have it." He spoke bitterly, and Landor looked at him in wonder.

There was a sound of draperies at the

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door, and they both came to their feet at sight of Rosamond. She stood there, wistful, sad, and with the rosiness of sleep upon her. She had lain down early to get her rest, and was up now, to take her place in service. Her warm, white dress clung about her, and the wide sleeves fell to her knees. With her loosened hair and grieving look, she was a picture of sweet childhood, not yet come to ripening, but with sorrow thrust upon it unprepared. After the first word of surprise, she came forward and shook hands with them. She looked at Markham questioningly. He nodded.

"Yes," said he. "I have seen her. There is no change."

He paused, and Landor, hearing Elizabeth come down the stairs, went out into the hall to meet her. There they talked a moment, and sat down together while she gave him urgent errands to be done in town.

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As soon as he had left the room, Rosamond turned eagerly to Markham.

"This is my first happy minute," she said. "It is because you've come. She won't die now. She can't; you will hold her back."

He smiled sadly at her.

"How can I hold her back?" he asked. "It is too late, Rosamond. I came too late."

Her face, with its young beauty, arrested him because it seemed like Helen's. There was no resemblance, yet the same spirit was there—the rapturous straining after something ineffable, unseen. Unimaginative as he was, it became apparent to him that the transforming veil was what these women were accustomed to call love—the consecration to something not themselves.

"I know she can be saved," she told him, swiftly; "because if I were sick—even like that—and Kent came, he could

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save me. And it isn't that she is burned so badly, Mr. Markham—I saw her hands when Hannah dressed them. They're not going to be disfigured, as you think—ah, don't, don't let me hurt you so!"

He turned away from her, to rest his forehead on the mantel, and stood there, breathing heavily.

"It's not even that she's so ill," she went on. "That could be met. She has lots of strength. It's that something terrifies her. You'll find out about it. You'll set her mind at rest."

Immediately some new understanding awoke and took possession of him; it pointed out the simplest way to go. He raised himself and took her hands in his.

"Rosamond," he said, "I know what terrifies her. Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, Mr. Markham, yes."

"It is about Kent."

Pride flamed in her face, but he would not heed it.

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"You must be a woman, Rosamond," he said. "Listen to me exactly as you would to Kent. I am going to do what he left undone. Will you listen?"

"Yes," she said, coldly, "I will listen."

"There has been a great wrong in Kent's life. He should have told you—"

"He tried to tell me. I forbade him."

"That was a mistake. It proves so."

"Then let him tell me when he comes."

"I shall tell you now. There was a wrong done—there was a woman—"

She looked him in the eyes; her own glance quivered, but it did not falter.

"Was Kent cruel to her?" she asked, steadily. "Did he desert her?"

"He stayed by her always—while she needed him."

She pulled her hand from his and turned away from him, to take long, hurrying steps across the room. In a moment she was back again; her face was wild with tears.

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"I must know," she said—"I must know it all. Because I must do what there is to do. I must give up—everything." Her wounded soul had turned from Kent himself; it was not possible, in that sharp moment, to think of his life and hers together in an equal flow. But all her spiritual allegiance made her demand the right of expiation. Markham spoke simply out of the sorrow that was upon him—for her, for Helen, and for Kent, who bruised the thing he would have cherished.

"Rosamond, the woman died."

She sat down in a low chair and leaned forward, her arms in their long drapery upon her knees. Her hair fell about her. She was an image of immortal grief.

He waited in the hopeless certainty of losing her, through this new coil of trouble that had befallen his house. She rose and came to him, her wet face quivering under a piteous smile.

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"Is that what troubles Helen?" she asked. "Was she afraid I should find out?—afraid I should blame him, judge him? Why, I'll tell her! 'Neither death nor life'—that was what she said the other night—'nor principalities nor powers'—Mr. Markham"—she spoke with the mature dignity newly born in her—"Kent is just the same to me as"—she paused and her voice broke—"as you are to Helen Markham. All except the years. And those are coming." She went softly, in a swift rush, up the stairs to Helen.

But no one could disturb Helen, even for her mind's assuaging. The doctor came back and stayed till morning, and she and Hannah watched together. John Markham sat outside the door and waited with bowed head, and Landor, below-stairs, brooded by the fire and felt once more at home because he was under the same roof with Bess. At dawn the doctor went, and Hannah laid a hand on John

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Markham's shoulder, where he sat on guard. He stood up, ready.

"Has it come?" he asked.

"Go in an' set a spell," said Hannah. Her tired face wore the mother-look. She felt as if she had been carrying Helen in her arms all night, and every part of her ached from that upholding. "You'll do more than any doctor."

Helen's eyes were on him as he entered. They were sane and sweet.

"How good it is!" she said.

"What, dearest?"

"To have you here. I wish I didn't have to die."

"Why do you say you have to die?"

"To make things straight. No, I don't want to die. I'd rather live, if things could be made straight."

Jane Harding had risen in her bed. She sat there in the unlovely disorder left her by the night. Her face was yellow, and her straight, black hair, confined in braids

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pathetically small, intensified her meagreness. John Markham, for the first time, looked at her. She recalled him, with a shock, to the tragic meaning of her presence there. Yet no one had seen Jane Harding as he saw her then; her face had aged and softened under pain and the suspense lived through in lonely hours.

"You let me speak," said she. .

Helen turned her head, and Markham held up his hand to keep the woman silent. But Helen answered, gently:

"Yes, Mrs. Harding. This is my husband. You remember."

Jane Harding had thrust her hand under the pillow, and now she brought it forth, the letters in her knotted fingers.

"Here!" She held them out to Markham, and he rose and took them. "You can give 'em back to Kent," she said. "You can put 'em in the fire. That's all there is about it."

Rosamond appeared softly at the door.

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Now she was at Helen's bedside in her white dress and with the night's knowledge on her altered face. John Markham, with a glance at her, walked out of the room, the letters in his hand, and Rosamond took the chair by Helen's bed. The two looked at each other in the growing light. Sad understanding passed between them, in a wordless message.

"You know!" said Helen, wonderingly.

"Yes, Mrs. Markham. There is nothing to trouble you—or any of us. Now you must sleep. I want you to be well—when Kent comes home."

Jane Harding had put her bandaged feet out of bed and set them on the floor. Her face changed sharply, but she walked. At the bedside she paused and laid her hand on Helen's coverlet.

"Don't you fret," said she. "There's nothing for you to fret about."

She moved on out of the room, and, when she wavered at the door, Helen called

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to her. Rosamond lifted a dissuading finger.

"No," she said, with the new authority born in her through knowledge. "No. Your husband is there—he and Graham Landor. Let them see to it."

Helen shut her eyes; and meantime Jane Harding went to town with Graham Landor, and they talked Brazil together.

And Helen lived.

The law of all loving is that lovers shall turn their backs upon the garden which lies "eastward in Eden," and set their faces towards the west. In their journeying they will come upon springs and dried water-courses, upon bloom and withering, upon ripeness and fallow fields. But if they keep the memory of Eden, the sun of noon and the later light will fall sweetly on their faces, and they will discover that the journey lies through the land of Heart's Content. And after sunset, no one knows.

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There, it may be, lies the land of Heart's Delight; for as the evening and the morning were the first day, so the last evening may be followed shortly by the morning.

THE END

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